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of Ontario**

First Session, 41st Parliament

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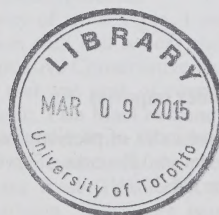
Première session, 41^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 5 March 2015

Jeudi 5 mars 2015



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 5 March 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 5 mars 2015

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION DU DROIT À LA PARTICIPATION AUX AFFAIRES PUBLIQUES

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 10, 2014, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 52, An Act to amend the Courts of Justice Act, the Libel and Slander Act and the Statutory Powers Procedure Act in order to protect expression on matters of public interest / Projet de loi 52, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les tribunaux judiciaires, la Loi sur la diffamation et la Loi sur l'exercice des compétences légales afin de protéger l'expression sur les affaires d'intérêt public.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When this item of business was last debated, the member from Dufferin-Caledon had the floor and has time remaining.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's a pleasure to begin again what I began in December. That was, of course, talking about Bill 52, the anti-SLAPP legislation or Protection of Public Participation Act.

I want to recap some of what I had covered previously. Of course, Bill 52 stands for strategic litigation against public participation, which are lawsuits that are pursued for the sole purpose of silencing or punishing those with an opposing viewpoint. SLAPPs are also referred to as "litigation chill," which we're going to cover in a little more detail this morning. Part of what defines a SLAPP is the fact that it has a meritless case and is intended more to intimidate or to punish the defendant rather than seek justice for a wrong suffered by the plaintiff. Typically, SLAPPs are withdrawn shortly before trial. However, the trial dates are often drawn out and by this time they've served their purpose as they've forced the defendant to go through an extended period of duress, often at great financial cost.

What Bill 52 proposes to do is to establish a new legal procedure that can be used if someone is sued for voicing their opinions on matters of public interest. If enacted, Bill 52 would allow the defendant in this situation to move

a motion that would allow them the chance to prove to a judge in a timely manner—and I think that's the important consideration here—that the legal proceedings brought against them arise from a communication they made regarding the public interest. If the judge was satisfied that this is the case, the legal proceeding would be dismissed. However, if the judge was not satisfied, the lawsuit would continue.

The judge would also be able to award compensation regarding costs on the motion if they deemed it appropriate. If the judge dismisses the legal proceeding due to the motion and finds that the suing party brought the proceeding in bad faith, the judge may award the defendant damages as the judge considers appropriate. If the suing party has proceedings before a trial, the defendant who has moved a motion under Bill 52 may also supply a copy of the motion that was filed to the court to a tribunal, and the tribunal proceedings shall be stayed until the motion is dealt with in court.

Bill 52 will also place a 60-day timeline on the hearing of the motion so that the matter may be dealt with in a timely manner. This is a key factor in limiting SLAPPs' negative effect on the court system. It is also important for countering the effect of potentially having tribunal proceedings stayed while the motion is before the courts.

I think I want to focus in a little more detail on that 60-day concept, because this is not going to stop people who have actually libelled or slandered someone. What it's going to do is it's going to expedite the process and ensure that within that 60-day period a decision is made whether it should proceed.

In the way of an example, I would like to talk about one litigation chill that is near and dear to my heart and to the Progressive Conservative Party. That is a litigation chill letter that was sent, of course, by Kathleen Wynne to Tim Hudak, Lisa MacLeod and the PC Ontario Fund. The statement of defence all surrounded a couple of comments that were made by my then-leader, the member from Niagara West-Glanbrook, and my colleague from Nepean-Carleton. They were issued litigation letters—we often call them lawyer's chill letters—basically to tell them to cease and desist from speaking any further about a particular issue. Of course, that issue was the gas plants and the decisions made surrounding it.

The important part of why I'm bringing this particular example up is that this began in September 2011, and it's still in process. So we're now here, in March 2015, and Tim Hudak, Lisa MacLeod and the PC Ontario Party still have that legal proceeding, that threat of a legal process, continuing to hang over their heads.

"In September 2011, during the provincial general election campaign"—in the interest of full disclosure, this is a court document filed in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice—"the Ontario Liberal Party promised to cancel the construction of the Greenfield South power plant," or the gas-fired plant, "in Mississauga ... a project formerly conceived and approved for construction in April 2005 by the Ontario Power Authority. The construction of the Mississauga gas plant was commenced in June 2011.

"On October 6, 2011, the Ontario Liberal Party won the provincial election, including the Mississauga ... seats in the vicinity of the Mississauga gas plant, and the government proceeded to take steps to stop the ongoing construction of the Mississauga gas plant."

There are a number of details and dates that come forward. It makes reference to the Auditor General's estimated cost of relocating the gas plant. It talks about September 10, the Ontario Power Authority awarding a contract; the city of Oakville opposing the building of the Oakville gas plant; and on and on we go.

In this case, "The plaintiff was the campaign co-chair of the 2011 Ontario Liberal Party campaign that made the decision to cancel the Mississauga gas plant. As a member of the executive council of Ontario, the plaintiff also signed the cabinet document that authorized the Liberal government to enter into arbitration with TransCanada over the cancellation...."

We can go into a lot more detail, but my point is that a litigation letter, a lawyer's chill letter that said to cease and desist any further discussion about the process surrounding the Mississauga and Oakville gas plants cancellation, is a perfect and obvious example of Bill 52.

This process began, as I stated earlier, in 2011, and here we are in 2015 and it has gone no further in court. The court has not reviewed whether this is actually moving forward. Yet we're talking four years later, and it's still hanging over our heads.

If Bill 52 were passed in its current process, this would not still be on the courts. This would not be bogging up the system. This would not be part of continuing to be that threat that reminds my two colleagues and the party I belong to that they're supposed to talk about what clearly was government policy of community and general interest. Bill 52 would have allowed us to have those very public, needed conversations without the worry of having any of their comments taken through a lawyer's letter. So I just highlight this example as one reason why we need to move forward on Bill 52.

0910

As many people in this chamber know, we've had a number of different examples—a couple of private members' bills and at least one other government bill—where we have attempted to move forward on making changes to the current strategic litigation against public participation process, so we do need to continue with that idea.

The other thing—I'm not going to give a carte blanche that the entire legislation is great. There have been some concerns raised, without a doubt. The forestry industry in

northern Ontario, of course, has gone through some terrible economic challenges in the last number of years, but they're not all related to the economy; some of them are related to some very strategic and pointed opposition from certain groups.

One of the recommendations of amending Bill 52, which would be to ensure that when we are talking about protecting the public from public consultation, or the ability to participate, is that we ensure it's not one large financially backed entity against a business or an individual or an industry. So perhaps we could look at some amendments that would—I'll just read what the recommendation is: If the legislation could be amended to specifically "apply to volunteers and small community organizations with annual budgets of less than \$100,000." That was one recommendation made by the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities.

I would hope that when we are at the committee stage, we can look at those types of amendments that ensure this is, in fact, about protecting the individual's right to participate and not an opportunity for large, financially backed organizations to be protected from saying whatever they want about whomever they want.

The act is also amended to establish qualified privileges that apply in respect to "an oral or written communication on a matter of public interest between two or more persons who have a direct interest in the matter" and "applies regardless of whether the communication is witnessed or reported on by media representatives or other" individuals. It's actually an important amendment as far as completing the goal of Bill 52, actually protecting public participation. I think we all understand that the world is a very different place now with tweets and Facebook posts, and we can't just be looking at the more mainstream, traditional forms of public participation, i.e. newspaper, radio and TV.

As it stands, there are currently privileges regarding oral or written communication that are possessed by individuals who have a direct interest in a matter, a public interest. What Bill 52 does is amend the Libel and Slander Act to extend these privileges to individuals, reporters recounting or repeating any discussions in the matter by those who do possess a direct interest in the matter. This is important because if a journalist is writing a story on something an individual said at a public meeting, while that individual could have been discussing a matter they had a direct interest in and be fairly protected from legal action, the journalist would technically not be protected as they arguably do not possess a direct interest but, rather, an indirect one.

Journalism and reporting is a tenet of a healthy democracy. If we're serious about protecting public participation, we absolutely must also protect the sanctity of the press to report on the news of the day and on the issues important to their local citizens.

Bill 52 is a necessary and much-needed improvement for dealing with SLAPP litigation. Just like I said in my previous discussion on Bill 52, in which I discussed examples of cases that could very well be considered SLAPP lawsuits, I would like to continue on that note.

There's an example that, again, many of us are quite involved in or quite aware of, and that is a young woman named Esther Wrightman. Esther Wrightman lived in southwestern Ontario and was very publicly opposed to the siting of some industrial wind turbines in her community. It's not unusual; we have many individuals across Ontario who have raised various concerns and various issues with the siting and placement of IWTs—industrial wind turbines—in their communities.

What makes Esther Wrightman's example unique is, again, that she was sent a lawyer's letter saying, "Cease and desist, we don't want you to talk anymore about this project, and if you do, you will be sued accordingly," and then there was a very large number, which was the threat: "If you continue, we're going to sue you and basically take you for everything you have and then some."

Unfortunately, it was effective in the case of Esther Wrightman. She ultimately ended up selling and moving out of the province. However, that lawyer's letter, that litigation chill, is still on the books. The originators of it, the owners of the IWT proposal, have not removed that chill, that concern, that stress. While I have not personally been the victim of one of those letters, I can imagine what it did to Ms. Wrightman, her family and, quite frankly, anybody in the community who wanted to continue opposition to the industrial wind turbines. It's a very, very effective tool to ensure that people stop talking about projects they are opposed to.

You know, we can get pretty specific here, talking about individual pieces of legislation, but the reality is that most of us understand that everyone deserves and has the right and should use it. We as legislators often tell our community, our students and our municipalities to get involved: "If there's something that is concerning you that's happening in your neighbourhood, your town or your municipality, get engaged and get involved." If we do not offer some legislative protection in the form of Bill 52, we're sending mixed messages, because we are not protecting people who want to speak out publicly on items that are happening that impact their community and impact their ability to enjoy their property and their community.

I still think it's a sad state of affairs that Ms. Wrightman was left with no choice, in her mind, but to sell her property and move out of the province so that she would not have that threat of litigation held over her head while she was attempting to get a remortgage or while she was attempting to make any expansions or changes to her business models. It's all there in the public realm, where there is a very substantial claim against her, simply because she wanted to share in a very public forum why she did not support the siting of industrial wind turbines in her community. It's a sad state, here in Ontario, when people don't have the opportunity to speak out against issues, whether it's the cancellation of gas plants, as is the case with my colleagues from Niagara West—Glanbrook and Nepean—Carleton, or in the case of Ms. Wrightman with industrial turbines.

We need to make sure that our legislation is protecting an individual's right to speak out. I understand that

within this chamber, we are all very well protected. But that's 107 members. It doesn't compare to the responsibility we have to the other 13 million who live in the province of Ontario. It shouldn't just be what we say in here that is protected. It should be the ability for everyone, regardless of where they are living in the province and what role they play—whether it's public or private or in business—they should also be protected.

0920

It is a fine line. Nobody wants to get to a stage where "I can say anything about anyone" and be above the law. There has to be the opportunity for people to protect their good name, their business's good name.

With Bill 52, with that 60-day opportunity, it would be reviewed and it would be decided in a very process-systemic way: Is this actually chill? Is this actually slander? If it is, absolutely go through the courts, take it through the process. But if it isn't, shut it down.

We wouldn't then have these lawyers' letters and litigation from—what did I say?—2011 still sitting in a court docket, clogging up our very challenged court system in March of 2015. Make no mistake: This is not about any intention of Ms. Wynne to bring Tim Hudak, Lisa MacLeod and the PC Ontario Fund to court. This is all about saying, "You keep talking about the Mississauga gas plants, and we're going after you." It was a very—to coin the phrase—strategic opportunity for them to threaten and to scare people out of talking about the process behind the Mississauga gas plant.

Mercifully, we have been able to ignore that threat, I think probably because my colleagues are MPPs and understand how the law works. But it doesn't make it any more—it's not right that that is still sitting there from 2011 and here we are four or five years later.

With that, I'm going to wrap up, but thank you for your time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It was quite interesting to listen to the member from Dufferin—Caledon. I was actually also in the House when she did the first 40 minutes of her lead. That was before Christmas. As she started to go through, a lot of what she had said sort of came back to me.

Bill 52, An Act to amend the Courts of Justice Act, the Libel and Slander Act and the Statutory Powers Procedure Act in order to protect expression on matters of public interest, certainly has a long title, but it's basically what people refer to as anti-SLAPP. She has given examples from her riding of people they had taken freedom of speech away from. This bill is an effort from this Legislature to bring a little bit more balance between the right of an individual to speak up if they see something that they are opposed to, and the right of the person who is being spoken against to defend their good name.

Right now, the balance is tilted through a judicial process that is so cumbersome and lengthy that it really precludes people from speaking up, because they receive those lawyers' letters and they feel quite intimidated,

afraid as to how much it will cost them to defend themselves. The bill is an effort to bring a little bit more balance between the two.

Ça m'a fait plaisir d'écouter la députée de Dufferin-Caledon. Elle avait commencé ses commentaires avant Noël, avant la pause parlementaire, et les a finis ce matin. C'est quand même intéressant. Ce que le projet de loi essaie de faire, c'est vraiment de prévenir les instances qui limitent la liberté d'expression sur les affaires d'intérêt public. On appelle ça des poursuites-bâillons, où les gens reçoivent une lettre d'un avocat ou d'une firme et se sentent mal à l'aise de continuer à prendre leur revendication.

Je vous remercie, monsieur le Président.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration—sorry, Tourism, Culture and Sport and Pan/Parapan.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Which one?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): My apologies.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to speak on Bill 52 today and to respond to the member from Dufferin-Caledon and the member from Nickel Belt. I think this is an important piece of legislation. The Protection of Public Participation Act, the anti-SLAPP legislation, is an important piece of legislation that was brought forward in 2013 by our government as Bill 83. I remember the previous Attorney General did bring it forward.

Really, this bill has one intention, and it's to fast-track any request that is brought forward to dismiss a case that's considered when people are using any form of intimidation to stop people from expressing themselves. I think this piece of legislation is important, because it does one really important thing: It strengthens our justice system and allows people to express themselves and to take a position on an issue without the fear of being dragged through the courts for years and ending up with a massive legal bill. Taking those 60 days to hear a case, to figure out if someone is misusing the justice system, I think is a great step in the right direction for the province of Ontario.

There are other jurisdictions in different parts of Canada and Quebec that have similar legislation, and there are different parts of the United States where they have similar legislation. I'm proud that our government has taken this step to move forward on this, because at the end of the day we want to build a society where people can freely get out there, bring up concerns and talk about important issues and not fear big corporations dragging them through the court system for years.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to make comments on my colleague from Dufferin-Caledon's speech, which was split between today and the last time this bill was debated.

As my colleague said and as the minister said, this legislation has been around since 2013. You have to ask

yourself, you have to question the commitment of a government that is taking this long to get a bill through this House. However, we're going to do what we can to help them, because they can't seem to get this thing figured out by themselves.

I want to say, Bill 52 is a bill that we're going to support. It's not without the reservations of some out there. There are a lot of people who are concerned about this bill. But I understand the principle of trying to protect the little guy from the big guy. That's part of the bedrock of our society. That's why we have democracies. Democracies were formed in order to protect the little guy.

But I have to ask myself—maybe this government has to ask themselves why they've gone so far to protect the big guy over the little guy when it comes to their industrial wind turbine policies and how impossible it is for someone to have a fair chance of winning against one of those groups, because, you see, those companies, their pockets have been filled—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would ask the member to tie it in to the comments.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It is tied in to the bill, Speaker. Thank you very much. It is tied in from the fact that if you've got a principle of protecting the little guy, you've got to look at your own record here. You've protected these big, gigantic wind farm developers so they're bankrupting people who bring a legal action against them. You know why? Because you made sure of it. In the way that you passed this law, the Green Energy Act, you made sure that the little guy would not be protected. Shame on you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to put a couple of things on the record in response to the comments made by the honourable member.

I think the legitimate issue here is that in a democratic society, people have the right to oppose or propose. In the particular case of development, there is always somebody who is opposed to a development of some type. That, to the consternation of the developer, is a real problem—economically being able to move forward with the project. Certainly, we see that in forestry. There's a real sense on the part of the forest industry that there are people who actually have it as a goal for them not to be able to do the business that they're in.

9930

Clearly, Ontario is in the forestry business and clearly, there are ways of being able to that; we've done it for years under sustainable development. I think the industry accepts that there are going to be people who are opposed, but you have to have a system in place that doesn't allow them to basically hold them to ransom when it comes to the market that they're trying to penetrate. Because a large part of what happens in the forest industry is being able to sell your product, like any other business, and unfortunately at times there are those who try to picture the forest industry in a way that it really is not in the market that they're trying to sell their

wood in. So they're worried about legislation like this and what it would mean to them should people continue down the road that some people have started on when it comes to trying to picture the forest industry for what it's not.

On the other side, there are people who have some legitimate concerns.

I think the real test in this bill is going to be, when we get to committee, does this bill find the medium between those two sides? Because clearly, the public has the right to express its views; and clearly, they have the right to say what it is they feel; and clearly, industry has got to be in a position where, when this is done, there's some sort of mechanism that allows you to deal with, how do you mitigate that in court or how do you not have it mitigated in court, depending on the situation? I think the real test will be when we hear from those at committee who speak to that issue.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Dufferin—Caledon, you have two minutes.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thanks, Speaker. I really appreciated those last comments from the member from Timmins—James Bay because I think it really is a balance. I think we need to ensure that public participation is an active part of the democratic process, whether it's in committee where we're hearing from witnesses and getting suggestions on amendments, or, quite frankly, after government decisions and policies have been made. People have the right to voice their opinions. We've seen both examples very recently.

I will say that there aren't a lot of SLAPP litigation processes that are happening right now in Ontario. I think that's a good thing. But the ones that are out there are very disturbing and are there for a very strategic reason: that is, to end the debate and end the discussion. As my colleague said, we've seen it with the cancellation of the gas plants; we've seen it with the industrial wind turbines.

In my own community, we had an example with a water-taking permit, where the adjacent surrounding neighbours were all issued cease-and-desist letters from the company's lawyers. So it can be a very draconian, nasty, nasty way to do business and silence your opponents. If Bill 52 is properly amended and properly brought in, I think we have an opportunity here to improve the system to ensure that that public participation continues in a measured and reasonable way across all of Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I am very pleased to join in the debate on Bill 52, the anti-SLAPP legislation. Before I begin, I want to make it very clear that the New Democratic Party absolutely supports this legislation. In fact, our leader brought forward anti-SLAPP legislation years and years ago, approximately in 2010, and we have been committed to the idea of public participation. So we're absolutely supportive of this initiative and we would have loved to see this bill move along faster.

I actually remember, when I first spoke on this bill, that I implored the government to do two things. One, I

said that there were a number of other bills that received priority; this bill did not receive the priority it deserved in the previous sitting of this Legislature. I had asked the government to prioritize this bill.

Secondly, I said that once you prioritize this bill, you need to move along with this bill in a manner that's expedient, because this is something that doesn't cost the government anything but it enshrines and protects a fundamental principle in our democracy; that is, the right to dissent, the right to participate and the right to get up and say, "I don't like what's going on." It's a very fundamental right and something that's absolutely critical for us here as legislators to protect.

When we are talking about the concept of public participation, literally the idea is that anyone in this province should be able to speak on any issue in a respectful manner, but in a forceful manner, should be able to get up and say, "Listen, I don't like the development in this particular community. I don't like the way this project is going about. I think there's an environmental risk that outweighs the benefit of this particular project."

Anyone, any citizen, should be able to get up, any resident should be able to get up and say, "Listen, I don't like what's going on. I don't appreciate the government's actions in terms of the way they're proceeding with a particular initiative. I don't agree with it." They can get together with a number of other citizens and say, "Listen, together we don't agree with what's going on."

When it comes to greenbelt initiatives, protecting the greenbelt or whether it comes to developments in rural or urban settings where they don't want a particular business to develop in a certain community because it might ruin the other existing infrastructure, the existing businesses, people should be able to say, "We don't like it."

What we've seen time and time again is when community members come together and raise their voice, when they come together and say, "Listen, we have a problem with what's going on," they've been strategically silenced: SLAPPs have been used as a tool. SLAPPs have been used as a tool to strategically commence a lawsuit against someone to discourage them from participating in a particular—whether it's raising a concern, whether it's a form of dissent, whether it's a protest, whether it's a coalition of people, this is a type of lawsuit that's been used time and time again to silence people.

There has been a number of examples in the province of Ontario. We have the Environmental Commissioner Gord Miller, and he writes in his annual report 2008-09, "The public's right to participate in decision-making over matters of public interest is a cornerstone of our democratic" process. "Efforts aimed at suppressing this right should be discouraged by the Ontario Legislature and other public agencies. The ECO sees a need for provincial legislation that would put both sides of development disputes on equal footing. Such legislation could serve to halt SLAPP suits in their tracks."

This is absolutely correct. The Environmental Commissioner raises a very important point. This is literally a cornerstone of our democracy: the right to dissent, the

ability to get up and protest, the ability to say, "I don't like what's going on." This is something we need to protect.

As parliamentarians, we are the ambassadors for democracy in this province. It's incumbent upon us to make sure we do whatever we can to protect people's rights. One of their essential rights is that; the essential right in a democracy is—if you look across other countries, people don't have the right to criticize their government. People don't have the right to criticize what's going on in their communities. That is what sets free nations apart from those that don't enjoy freedom. That's what sets nations that enjoy liberties and enjoy human rights apart from countries that don't enjoy those rights and those liberties. That's what makes us unique and that's something that we need to protect.

This law is certainly a step in the right direction. It is certainly a law that will protect public participation. It is a law that would legislate the protection of a democratic value. So for that reason, it's certainly an excellent step forward.

In fact, the advisory panel that was struck was made up of a number of very skilled and talented lawyers: the chair, Mayo Moran, was a dean of the faculty of law; Brian MacLeod Rogers, a very well-respected entertainment and libel and defamation lawyer; as well, Peter Downard, who was at Fasken Martineau and also very well-versed and experienced in defamation law.

Just to give you some examples: the feeling people have when they get together, let's say, in downtown Toronto, if we use an example. People in an urban setting have a vibrant community. Perhaps a big-box store decides to purchase and buy out a number of other small stores and says, "We want to put in our big-box store right here in the middle of the community."

Folks in the community get together and say, "Listen, this would disrupt the fabric of the community that we've built, the community that we're a part of, that we enjoy. We like the uniqueness of the way we have developed this community. We have unique stores and shops. We like the way it's set up. A big-box store would come in and disrupt that and it would change the fabric of this community in a way that we don't want to see happen."

0940

So they get together and say, "Listen, we're opposed to this happening. When this issue goes before the OMB, we're saying, 'We don't want this to happen.'" They create a coalition and say, "Listen, this is unacceptable. This will change the fabric of our community. This will not improve it. In fact, this will ruin the way we enjoy this area, so we're against it," and they get together and start protesting.

Now, if those folks are protesting, all of a sudden the big company that wants to develop this big-box store sends them a letter and wants to initiate a lawsuit. They receive the letter. Imagine the feeling: You receive a letter and it says, "So-and-so company is suing you for \$4 million for defamation because you got up and said that this big-box store, or this company, is going to ruin

your community. That's defamation. You're saying that this store is bad. You're attacking the company." You receive this letter in the mail and it says, "You're being sued for \$4 million."

The chilling effect of that, receiving that letter, reading that, those words, being sued for \$4 million—it has such a chilling effect. It's such a discouraging thing to see. In fact, people become very afraid. They are afraid that they could lose their entire life savings, that they could lose their home. They are not thinking about continuing their public participation. They are not thinking about continuing the discourse or about continuing to raise the concerns that their community has. They're thinking, "Listen, we've got to stop, because we don't want to get sued for this \$4 million." So they stop talking about the issue. They're discouraged from talking. Some people—and I don't fault them for doing that—are so afraid that they absolutely stop. They don't talk about the issue anymore, and they move on their way.

Some brave souls continue to fight, and they end up being sued and they end up being brought before the courts. In the courts, they have to fight to clear their name. Often you have citizens, members of the community, that don't have deep pockets. They don't have a lot of resources. They're regular folks, everyday folks, with bills to pay, and they are up against companies that have deep pockets, that have lawyers on retainer, that have millions of dollars to throw and hundreds of thousands of dollars to throw at any sort of lawsuit that they want.

What happens is you have this disparity, this imbalance. This imbalance discourages everyday folks from raising their concerns and encourages companies to silence the voices of those people who might have a problem with their projects. That's the unfairness of this: that it's not a level playing field. You have people who have deep pockets and resources and experts and lawyers, and you have everyday folks who don't have those same resources. They feel compelled, then, to no longer participate. That's not what we want to see in our society. That's not what we want to encourage.

In fact, we want the exact opposite to happen. We want people to be able to get up and say what they feel. We want people to come together as communities and voice their concerns. We want to encourage that. As it stands, without having protection through an anti-SLAPP legislation, we don't have that protection right now.

What does this law essentially do? To put it in simple terms, it allows the person who is being sued a quick way to point out that this lawsuit is actually just a way to silence them, and to have the lawsuit dismissed. That's what this legislation proposes to do. Essentially, that component of the early dismissal, the ending of a lawsuit that's unfair, pointing out that the lawsuit is strictly designed, or strategically designed, to silence them, to silence public participation, and showing that to a judge, that, "This is why I'm being sued, and that's why I'm asking to you to dismiss this case outright"—that's the purpose of this legislation, and that's an excellent purpose.

The mechanism of the way this is done is something quite unique, because it changes hundreds of years of defamation law and libel law. It's always a touchy thing when you change hundreds of years of jurisprudence. However, it's something that's appropriate and that's necessary for us to do.

So what is the mechanism, how does it play out, and where do we need to really look at what this law is doing?

One of the things that is important is that it allows for a time limit. What happens often is, if you are involved in the court system—and as a criminal defence lawyer, I've experienced this time and time again—the court systems often move very slowly. It's something that we need to improve. It's a question of access to justice. People sometimes wait years and years for a matter to be settled in court. Really, if we talk about the rule of law being the bedrock of a free and democratic society—that it's law-based in terms of the decisions, not by force, not by might; it's by the rule of law, and the law is applied equally to the citizens, to the residents of that community—that gives us some faith that we live in a system that we can rely upon, that's going to be treating everyone fairly.

The problem is that, in a system of the rule of law, in a system of law, if it takes years and years to get any settlement, to get any decision in a court, it erodes some of the trust we have in that system. If we want to rely on the system to be able to get us a fair decision, but it takes years and years for that decision to happen, it takes away some of our faith in the fact that the system is actually going to protect our interests.

Well, that's even more true in cases where someone is being sued in a defamation lawsuit. In those cases, we have examples of people who wait years and years, they have to fight for years and years, to actually get the case dismissed. That is absolutely discouraging. Having the weight of a multi-million-dollar lawsuit hanging over you impacts everything: It impacts your day-to-day life, impacts your ability to go to work, impacts your relationships, and impacts your participation in the community. It has a severe impact on you.

We need to ensure that there's a way to limit that time so that people don't have this lawsuit hanging over their head for years. We want a way to dismiss this in an expedient manner, in a quick manner. There's a 60-day time limit that's applied here, and that's absolutely essential and fundamental. It's so important to have this, because that allows the lawsuit to be dismissed in a quick way. So, 60 days, two months; your motion is heard and you can show that this lawsuit is strategically being used to silence you—there are certain criteria—the lawsuit is then dismissed and you can move on with your life. That is absolutely what we need to see, and that's very encouraging.

The grounds: The way the law is going to work is that the law lays out some fundamental principles, and these principles are exactly what we'd like to see in this bill. Let's talk about those principles. The law is defined by

these four components, and these four components are found in section 137.1. Clause (a) reads, "to encourage individuals to express themselves on matters of public interest." That's exactly what we want to see. We want people to feel encouraged to participate, to express their concerns, particularly where it's something about public interest. If the public has an interest, people should be able to get up and say: "This is how I feel about this issue. These are my concerns. This is what I like; this is what I don't like." We want to see that happen. We want to encourage that.

Clause (b) reads, "to promote broad participation in debates on matters of public interest." The idea that people should be able to debate matters of public interest, to discuss it amongst each other and amongst community members, that's something we want to see happen. And this bill lays that out as one of the purposes of the bill, and that's also very encouraging.

Clause (c) reads, "to discourage the use of litigation as a means of unduly limiting expression on matters of public interest." That's exactly what some of these cases of lawsuits that are used to silence people—that's exactly what they're being used for. The litigation that we want to discourage is litigation that purposely limits expressions on matters of public interest. If people are talking about matters of public interest and there's a lawsuit that's designed to limit that expression, that's exactly what we want to discourage. We want to discourage that type of litigation.

Finally, clause (d) reads, "to reduce the risk that participation by the public in debates on matters of public interest will be hampered by fear of legal action." This is really the final point in terms of the actual purpose, and (d) is very purposely the last component of what this law is all about, because of the fear that people have of legal action. People have this fear embedded in them. If they receive a letter from a lawyer outlining the potential that they will be sued, that has such a chilling effect, such a discouraging effect; it instills so much fear that people no longer want to participate. That's what we want to get rid of. We don't want people to fear legal action against them for participating in something that has a public interest. That's what we want to discourage. That's the type of litigation we want to end, and that's what this law seeks to do.

It's very encouraging that those four components of the purpose of the law have been laid out. It really informs the rest of the bill, and it informs what we're trying to do. This is what Andrea Horwath, as the leader of the New Democratic Party in Ontario, also tried to do in her private member's bill that was first introduced about four years ago. This is a core principle of the New Democratic Party, something we strongly support and stand for. I just want to read out—just to get a sense of what people feel when they're being faced with a lawsuit—some of the concerns and some of the personal emotions that go through one's mind when you're faced with a lawsuit.

0950

There was a case of a SLAPP, a strategic lawsuit against public participation, in the case of Geranium Cor-

poration v. the Innisfil District Association. In this case, Geranium was a developer and they were proposing a Big Bay Point mega-marina and resort on Lake Simcoe. As a result of this development, a number of individuals wanted to raise their concerns. What happened in this case is, in responding to multiple lawsuits and an unprecedented claim for \$3.2 million in OMB costs against the Innisfil District Association and its lawyers, one defendant swore in an affidavit to OMB—these were the feelings that people had. They challenged this development, and the lawyer who was representing the Innisfil District Association that was concerned about this development said, “Listen, we don’t agree with it; we don’t like the way it’s being developed.” They indicated, “I feel threatened, harassed, and intimidated by Geranium’s legal claims, and fear exposure to lawsuits and the costs associated with defending them.”

Another quotation from another individual who was the subject of a lawsuit said, “I do not write letters to the town, county, province or local papers in fear of repercussions from the Big Bay Point developers, Kimvar Enterprises Inc., and Mr. Earl Rumm.” “From fear of being implicated in a lawsuit myself, I would not write a letter or voice my personal opinions about the project in any way whatsoever.”

Finally, another quote from someone who was sued: “I do not have the funds or means to defend myself in a lawsuit, which increases my fear of publicly speaking out as an individual.” “I would not testify at an OMB hearing with the lawsuits pending and the threat of new legal actions. I would not be able to defend myself financially from such a wealthy developer.”

This really captures the feelings and the emotions that people have. This is a legitimate concern. People in the community want to say, “We don’t like the way this development is proceeding”—something that I can imagine myself doing. If something happened in my community and I didn’t like the particular development—maybe I didn’t like the way it was designed; maybe I thought it wasn’t incorporating the community in a way that was positive; maybe it was taking away from the character of that area; whatever it was—and I wanted to say, “Listen, let’s get together and talk about this issue. Let’s have a public debate on this,” and I organized a public debate. I say, “Let’s get together and talk about the pros and cons of this,” and I get up and say, “Listen, there are a number of cons. I think this is going to be deleterious or negative for our community for a number of reasons,” and I list those reasons. And the next day I see in registered mail at my door that I’m being sued because I got up and said that there were some cons to this development. That is absolutely unacceptable. The thought that someone could be sued simply for getting up in a community and saying, “Hey, I don’t agree with this. I don’t think this is a good idea because it could hurt our community”—simply by saying it could hurt a community, the developer could then turn around and sue me and say, “We’re going to commence a lawsuit against you for millions of dollars because you’re jeopardizing our project”—and they

could. They’re within their right to do so. That’s a problem. We don’t want that to happen. We don’t want people to fear legal actions, and that fear of legal action discourages them from participating and from voicing their concerns and having an opinion and laying out their concerns. It shouldn’t be the case. That’s why we absolutely support this piece of legislation.

Normally, when we speak about legislation, we like to look at other examples: Has there been another jurisdiction where this has been implemented and how has it worked out? This is something I really want to stress, and I hope that when we take this to committee—I ask the Attorney General to also consider this as well.

We have a great leader in terms of another province that has implemented first-of-its-kind-in-Canada anti-SLAPP legislation in Quebec. I’m sure the Attorney General is well aware of this, but we need to look at their experience. I was just reading up on some of their experience. They’ve implemented it for a number of years and they’ve been able to look at some of the pros and cons and how it’s worked. So though they’ve noted that it has discouraged some strategic lawsuits against public participation—it has discouraged some SLAPPs—and it has allowed for the speedy dismissal of some of the SLAPPs, there is still a significant number. I’ll give one example.

This law was introduced in Quebec in 2009, approximately, and on January 19, 2011, there was a company, Petrolia, a Quebec oil and gas company, that sued Le Soleil, which is a newspaper, and Ugo Lapointe, who, at the time, was head of a mining watchdog group called the Coalition Québec meilleure mine. Though there was anti-SLAPP legislation that was implemented—which was good and which is something we’d like to see here—these two individuals for the newspaper were writing about the developer and some of the activities they were engaging in were not something the community wanted to see. The mining watchdog group was raising concerns, and Mr. Lapointe was also raising concerns about it. They were still hit with a strategic lawsuit. We need to look at their case studies and how the law has played out in Quebec, to make sure we don’t get caught up in the same problems, that we can improve off of where they’ve seen that maybe there are some shortcomings in their legislation.

We need to make sure that, in our deputations, if possible, we encourage perhaps even the staff of the equivalent of the Attorney General in Quebec to perhaps speak about their experiences and how they would improve a law in its infancy, because we have a great opportunity now: the law is being crafted, and, in committee, we could potentially improve some things. If we look at other jurisdictions, particularly a very similar jurisdiction—though Quebec has a civil law system which is somewhat different—it would still be very informative for us to look at what’s going on there and to see how we could improve our legislation. So I ask that, certainly in committee, we consider hearing from Quebec and from some representatives in Quebec who could talk about their experience there.

Other examples of SLAPPs being used here in Ontario: SLAPPs are commonly used against environmental activists, people who are concerned about the environment, and against people who are concerned about developments in their communities, and here's another example. The example is the Rural Burlington Greenbelt Coalition. They were opposing the dumping of untested fill at the Burlington Airpark. When they cited government documents that supported their criticism of the dumping of the fill, two members of the coalition were slapped with a \$100,000 defamation suit each.

SLAPPs are still being used. It's something that's still going on. Sometimes we think we don't know of examples. There are still a number of examples around the province, so it's important for us to keep that in mind.

One of the areas where I had indicated that this is changing the way defamation and the way the law has been for hundreds of years: I want to touch on that just briefly and talk about how it's being changed. While I think it's appropriate that we need the change, I think we also need to be sensitive to some areas that we might want to look at.

One of the areas of concern—this was raised by a number of very experienced lawyers who had argued defamation cases, and some of the most important defamation cases here in Ontario. The issue that was raised by these lawyers was that we need to be very careful about the implications of these changes that we're proposing here. While I agree with the changes and while they flow from the recommendation of the anti-SLAPP legislation panel that was struck—and members of the panel are, of course, very skilled lawyers—one of the things we need to look at is that there is a changing of the onus, and that changing of the onus could open up certain people to more exposure to defamation. We need to be aware of that.

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The portion of the law that talks about when you can dismiss a case is under subsection 137.1(3). The way the order to dismiss works is: "On motion by a person against whom a proceeding is brought, a judge shall, subject to subsection (4), dismiss the proceeding against the person if the person satisfies the judge that the proceeding arises from an expression made by the person that relates to a matter of public interest."

There are a number of grounds that the judge has to be satisfied by. The judge has a look at the case and say, "Listen, if these things are present, then I will not dismiss the case, and if they are not present, then I can move ahead with the motion."

The areas are the following:

—"the proceeding has substantial merit." If you can show that the proceeding has substantial merit, that's one of the grounds you need to show so that you can continue with the defamation;

—"the moving party has no valid defence in the proceeding." If there's no defence of the proceeding at all, then you can continue with the defamation claim;

—"the harm likely to be or have been suffered by the responding party as a result of the moving party's expression is sufficiently serious that the public interest in permitting the proceeding to continue outweighs the public interest in protecting that expression." This is the area where we have a balancing. The balancing is important, but what it does is—we have to understand that there are certain people who always satisfy the test of being in the public interest.

If someone decides to make defamatory comments against, for example, an elected official, one could always argue that it's in the public interest to raise concerns about elected officials because elected officials are in the public and they represent the public. One could argue that it's always in the public interest for someone to get up and say, "I have a concern with this member who's an elected official." They could say things that are negative about that elected official. We have to be careful that if defamatory comments are used against people who are in a position of some public importance, they are now potentially open to more defamatory comments with less remedy.

The example that was given to me was the example of *Scientology v. Hill*. In that case, it was a prosecutor, someone who worked for the Ministry of the Attorney General—a provincial crown prosecutor. That prosecutor was involved in search warrants surrounding the Church of Scientology. Long story short, the issue was that some of the actions of this prosecutor resulted in the Church of Scientology suing Mr. Hill, a very respected prosecutor, for defamation. Eventually, Mr. Hill won the case and was able to show that there were no grounds for the defamation, but if we apply this current legislation to Mr. Hill's scenario, Mr. Hill would potentially not be able to dismiss the defamation against him because the new laws have changed the onus somewhat.

It's something to keep in mind. In the Hill example, it was absolutely unfair what happened to Mr. Hill; and the thought that something like that would not be caught, or that Mr. Hill would not be protected and in fact would potentially be in a more difficult position because of this law, is something that we need to consider. That's something that would balance our concerns somewhat.

Again, we absolutely need to have protection of public participation. It's just something for us to look at—that there might be cases where we are now exposing people who are in the public or who satisfy the public interest to more exposure and perhaps more lawsuits, and not really giving them a defence. It's something to consider.

We have another very recent example of SLAPP suits being used just a couple of years ago. People raised some significant concerns about Marineland and the treatment of animals in Marineland. We can all think about the animals that we kind of fondly remember, whether it's in commercials or whether it's going to water parks in the past. We look at the whales and the—

Interjection: Dolphins.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh:—dolphins and the seals and we think, "These animals are cute," and they inspire a lot of

affection in us. So it would make sense that if someone, if trainers working at Marineland realized that there was mistreatment of these animals, they would want to come forward and say, “Hey, listen, what’s going on at Marineland? They’re not treating these animals right. They’re not being treated in an appropriate manner.” So they raised their concerns. It seems like something that would be reasonable to do.

There was, in fact, a coalition of folks who cared about these animals and were concerned about their treatment. They received information from trainers saying that there were some problems. Right now, Dylan Powell of Marineland Animal Defense is facing a \$1.5-million SLAPP, and this was launched when he decided to shine light on Marineland’s operations. He discussed some of the issues around the way the animals were treated. In 2012, the Toronto Star broke a story that Marineland was burying animals on-site in mass graves without permits. A \$1.5-million claim was filed against Dylan and the Marineland Animal Defense. It changed the media focus on the mass animal graves to a mass lawsuit.

So, one, it changed the story. It took attention off Marineland, and the story became this massive lawsuit, but it also discourages people who want to raise concerns. That story hit the media. People know that there was this massive lawsuit. The impact of it is that people know that if they raise their concerns, they might suffer a potential lawsuit—they might be threatened with a lawsuit and they might face a lawsuit.

People get discouraged when they hear that. It’s a real issue. It’s a real fear that people have. So we really need to look at what we can do to protect those folks. It’s a real issue. We have people across this province who are facing lawsuits, and it’s not just environmentalists; it’s not just people who are concerned about the welfare of animals. It’s people that—something as simple as developments in their own communities.

I gave that example. It’s important for us to really put our minds to scenarios. People can just talk. Even public debate has resulted in cases where people were threatened with lawsuits. If you organize public debate currently and you organize debate on a potential development or a potential action of a major corporation, you, right now, are susceptible to a potential lawsuit. It’s a real fear. It’s a real concern. People talk about it all the time. The fact that simply receiving a letter in the mail has such an impact, such a fear associated with that, just the threat of a lawsuit, is another area that we need to talk about.

While this law will certainly address the concerns raised by lawsuits when they are actually commenced and dismissing those lawsuits, what about the scenario where you just receive a letter in the mail? I benefit from having legal training. I understand that a letter by itself isn’t a lawsuit. A letter by itself has to be followed up by additional steps for it to become a legal action. A letter doesn’t actually commence legal action. It’s just a threat to commence a legal action.

But we also need to understand that there is often a lack of education about what those letters imply. So if I

receive a letter in the mail and I don’t know about the law system to a great extent—I receive a letter and I’m a layperson—I might think that that letter itself is the lawsuit. If I receive a letter, there’s no lawsuit commenced, but that letter in and of itself could discourage me from talking about the issue.

This legislation doesn’t do anything to address that letter. We need to consider, perhaps, a number of different ways to address this, but one of the ways is, people need to know more about the system in general. When it comes to protecting public participation, which is the essential ingredient of this law, we also need to look at the ways that public participation is silenced or discouraged without the actual commencing of a lawsuit, that those letters in and of themselves can discourage people, and at what we can do to ensure that those folks who are silenced through simply a letter in the mail—what we can do to encourage them to, one, know their rights, know that a letter in itself should not cause you to fear, should not cause you to feel that you have to be silent. So that’s something we need to consider as well.

When we look at other examples of strategic lawsuits to silence public participation, we also need to look at the climate and the priority that this government has given this bill. We have to look at some of the history.

Now, the government claims that there was an election that deterred this bill from being brought forward, but we have to actually roll back the clock a little bit further. This law has been introduced a number of times in the previous session. Even before the election was called, this law had been introduced. It was not given the time, it was not given the priority, and it was not given the importance that it deserved.

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Again, this is a law that doesn’t cost any money. This is not going to, in any way, impact the budget. This is not a law that’s going to require any extra resources. This is simply a law that protects public participation. So it makes absolutely no sense that this law was not given the priority that it should have.

In the previous session I spoke about the fact that there were a number of other laws that were pushed in and they were given priority over this law. It made no sense at the time, and I want to reiterate that now you have an opportunity. The law is now being debated at second reading. Please give this law the priority it deserves. It is something of fundamental importance to our society and it’s now the government’s responsibility to make sure that this law goes through in a timely manner.

We want to ensure that people are protected, and having legislation come forward, debated and then never brought into third reading, never passed, will not actually offer that protection. I know a number of stakeholders who have said, “Listen, this law had been brought forward; the government hadn’t really given it any time—now it died on the order paper and it’s being reintroduced again.” We need to make sure that the government follows through on this and that it’s not simply satisfying people’s concerns by just bringing the bill forward. We

need to satisfy their concerns by actually implementing it into law. Again, I encourage the government to do so.

We need to make sure that we get this bill right the first time. When it comes to committee hearings, we need to have significant committee hearings and make sure we hear from all the experts. Let's not ram this bill through committee. Make sure the committee hearing is thoughtful, that we have proponents of the bill come forward and that we also have people who are concerned about the scope of the bill come forward so that we can craft the best bill possible. I think that's essential. That's absolutely important.

One of the things that's very encouraging is that the panel that was struck came up with a number of recommendations. We've seen this government hear recommendations in the past and then never implement them. I can think of an example when it comes to the Special Investigations Unit here in Ontario. The Ontario Ombudsman came forward with a number of very, very clear recommendations—legislation that needed to be changed to improve the SIU—that could have been implemented by this government, and that report was provided and has been shelved, and none of those recommendations have been implemented.

We've seen, time and time again, important reports—reports that have been very informative—being brought forward and not implemented. In this case, though, I have to say that this is one of the rare examples where I looked through the report provided by the anti-SLAPP panel and all of the major recommendations have been put forward in this bill; they've been addressed, and that's very encouraging.

Using this as an example, I know you can do it. We've seen in this bill that the recommendations provided by the panel have been implemented into this law. Since I know you can do it, I ask you to do it as well in other areas.

When it comes to police accountability—it's an important issue, and we have recommendations by an objective, independent third party, someone who is well respected, André Marin, who talks about concerns that he has with the ability of the SIU to do its job, concerns about the Ministry of the Attorney General not encouraging the SIU or not allowing the SIU or creating barriers for the SIU to do its job. These are concerns raised by the independent watchdog for Ontario. Those recommendations weren't implemented. There are recommendations for child and youth services that we've seen tabled before and not implemented. Now that we know that you can actually implement recommendations, and you've done so in this bill—and I applaud you for it. We'd like to see you implement other recommendations that have been submitted by other panels and by other reports.

One of the issues that comes to mind, when we're talking about the idea of protecting public participation, is the lack of awareness and lack of education in terms of what the community knows about their rights. If we're talking about the idea of public participation, hand in hand with that is making sure that the community is

aware of what their rights are in terms of public participation.

I want to take this opportunity to discuss what the government can do to ensure that there's a climate in this government, in this province, that supports public participation. If we're talking about legislating the protection of public participation, if we're talking about legislating protection so that people don't fear engaging in democracy, this is what this bill is about.

We also have to look at the climate that's being created here in Ontario. One of the things that I want to talk about is the concept of the right to dissent. People don't know what their rights are and often are misinformed—I understand that we're close to—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): This House stands recessed until 10:30 a.m.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to announce some visitors from the Leamington area, who are here today in the gallery: Andrea Cassidy, Jacqueline Galy, Kimberly DeYong, Sandra Dick, Heidi Omstead, Kim Johnston and Natalie Mehra. It's about the obstetric services in the Leamington hospital.

M. Gilles Bisson: J'aimerais introduire à l'Assemblée législative quatre étudiants du comté de Timmins-Baie James qui sont ici pour le Parlement des jeunes : Francis Létourneau de Hearst, avec Renée-Anne Pitre de Hearst; on a, de l'École secondaire Thériault de Timmins, Josée Lavoie; et, intéressant, de l'École Renaissance, Maël Bisson. Je n'ai aucune idée s'il est de la parenté, mais je vais le savoir parce qu'on s'en va dîner aujourd'hui à 11 h 35. So, on va avoir la chance de voir si Maël est apparenté avec le M. Bisson de l'Assemblée.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I've had that problem in the past with my family, not knowing my relatives.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's my pleasure to welcome ward 1 Councillor Greg Beros of Richmond Hill and also Mr. Mike Ostafichuk from Richmond Hill Branch 778 Ban-shee Squadron and a comrade of the Richmond Hill Legion. Welcome to the Legislature.

M. John Vanthof: J'aimerais introduire, avec le Parlement jeunesse, Lionel Lemieux, Jessy Côté, Mélissa-Lyne Roy, Toni-Aliane Haquard, Samuel Harvey et Brittany Pépin. Ils viennent de la circonscription de Timiskaming-Cochrane. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

M. Grant Crack: C'est un grand plaisir pour moi ce matin de souhaiter la bienvenue à tous les participants de la neuvième édition du Parlement jeunesse qui sont ici ce matin. Un bonjour très spécial pour les participants de ma circonscription de Glengarry-Prescott-Russell : Camille Sigouin, Jean-Sebastien Boyer, Jérémie Racine, Zoé

Lavergne, Marielle Racette, et aussi Éric Dubois, Geneviève Latour, Éric Marcotte, Marie-Christine Castonguay et Étienne Camirand. Bienvenue, tout le monde.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Moi aussi, ça me fait extrêmement plaisir d'accueillir les jeunes du Parlement jeunesse francophone, plus spécifiquement deux jeunes hommes de mon comté : M. Olivier Bélanger et M. Chad Savard.

I would also like to take this opportunity, while I'm up, to welcome two physicians from the Mood Disorders Centre of Ottawa. Dr. Anne Duffy and Dr. Paul Grof are here with us at Queen's Park. Welcome to Queen's Park. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: C'est avec grand honneur que je veux souhaiter la bienvenue au Parlement des jeunes francophones que j'ai eu le plaisir de rencontrer hier soir, et particulièrement certains membres de ma circonscription : Gabriel Cyr, Jenna Rossi, Mackenzie Wall, Mélissa-Samuele Anthonin, Laurianne Mbuluku, Réginald-Yves Lundi. Et un grand merci à Camille Sigouin qui est étudiante dans mon bureau de circonscription. Je vous souhaite une belle session.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It gives me great pleasure to rise today to welcome Andrea Cassidy, Jacqueline Galy and Kimberly DeYong. They're here today with Save OB Leamington, the Essex County Health Coalition, the Ontario Health Coalition and residents of Essex county to save the obstetrics and gynecology services at Leamington District Memorial. They're not in the gallery yet; they were doing a press conference. They should be up soon.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to welcome Peter Killorn, who is visiting us from Halifax, and Tess Killorn, his sister. They are the brother and sister of the wonderful Bill Killorn, who is the director of issues management in the Premier's office. Welcome, and enjoy watching your brother work today.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to welcome Sandra Dick, Heidi Omstead, Kim Johnston and Natalie Mehra. If members are wondering where they got the cute little baby bonnets, they are courtesy of these folks, who are here to raise awareness about the closure of the OB unit at Leamington District Memorial Hospital.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On behalf of the member for Eglinton—Lawrence and page Arlyne James, I'm pleased to welcome Arlyne's mother, Sheliagh Flynn James; her brother, Connal James; her uncle, Brian Flynn; and her cousin, Devlan Flynn. They'll be in the members' gallery this morning. Would members please offer them a welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
Sergeant-at-Arms?

Associate Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'd like to welcome the family of our page captain Fardin today. His mother, father and brother are in the gallery. We'd like to welcome Farzana Huq, Khairul Islam and Farhan Islam. They are my wonderful constituents. Please welcome them.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je voudrais souhaiter la bienvenue aux jeunes d'Ottawa qui participent au Parlement jeunesse francophone, de l'École secondaire De La Salle et de Samuel-Genest, les deux meilleures écoles secondaires de l'Ontario.

Hon. David Oraziotti: I want to welcome Nathan Salituri, who is here from Sault Ste. Marie as part of the francophone model Parliament.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Also in the members' gallery, we have Dr. Robert Brown, a retired professor from the University of Waterloo and president of the International Actuarial Association. We have Jim Keohane, the president and CEO of the Healthcare of Ontario Pension Plan and member of our technical advisory group on retirement security. We also have Victoria Hubbell, who is a senior vice-president, strategy and stakeholder relations, at HOOPP. They're here today providing briefing sessions on the findings from Dr. Brown's report, *A Case Against Shifting Public Sector Defined Benefits Plans to Defined Contributions*.

I'd like to congratulate HOOPP on being one of the pension companies internationally recognized for their earnings. Congratulations.

M^{me} Sophie Kiwala: Je veux dire une grande bienvenue aux étudiants qui viennent de Kingston et les Îles au « model Parliament » des jeunes francophones : Isaac Goggin, Sébastien Gravel, Vincent Bélanger et Nathan Feuillat. Bienvenue.

Mr. Jim Wilson: I'd like to ask all members to join me in welcoming grade 5 students from Father F.X. O'Reilly school in Tottenham. Welcome to the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): With us in the Speaker's gallery today is a former member from Carleton East in the 33rd, 34th, 35th and 36th Parliament, Monsieur Gilles Morin. Welcome.

USE OF PROPS IN THE HOUSE

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As I have done before—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

As I have done before, I noticed an item that could be considered and classified—and it is by me—as a prop. The disappointing part about this is that advice was already provided to those who put it on the desks. That they still did it anyway is not impressive to me, and I'm not happy.

1040

I also suggest to you that House leaders must agree to these issues, and normally, what is done is they are found on the outside galleries or in the lobbies, and with the approval of all three House leaders, they do unanimous consent.

So I am not happy that this is happening, just as I was not happy the last time I had to speak to this regarding a separate issue with almost the same intent, to use it as a prop.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Acting Premier. On December 11, a particular federal MP stood up to address the Canadian House of Commons and made statements like “New Democrats have,” “New Democrats support” and “New Democrats also feel.” That was your new member from Sudbury. Those words were spoken on the afternoon of December 11, the same afternoon the Premier claims to have told Andrew Olivier she was appointing Mr. Thibeault.

Acting Premier, if your Premier had already decided to appoint Mr. Thibeault as the Liberal candidate on December 11, do you really think it's appropriate that he was passing himself off as a New Democrat and collecting his federal paycheque until your operatives could sway Mr. Olivier with an alleged bribe?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have to say that Glenn Thibeault is an excellent addition to our caucus, to our government. He is a very strong advocate for the people of Sudbury and we welcome him here on the government side.

Throughout his career, Glenn has shown an unwavering commitment to the people of Sudbury. I've had a chance to speak to this before and I will speak to it again. He has fought tirelessly for supports for persons with developmental disabilities, and I know that's an issue that's important to you and other members of your caucus. He has fought tirelessly for quality services for families struggling with autism. He was a director of the United Way. He led many successful campaigns in support of community development. He was a proud volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters and he coached minor hockey and football. He's helped empower Sudbury youth to achieve their full potential.

We are delighted that Glenn Thibeault has chosen the Liberal Party—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Mr. John Yakubski: You're not here to promote Glenn Thibeault.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke will come to order.

Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Acting Premier: The Premier said she made the decision to appoint Mr. Thibeault on November 30. She allegedly told Mr. Olivier on December 11. Pat Sorbara offered Mr. Olivier an appointment to step aside on December 12. Mr. Thibeault made his announcement public on December 17. Confusingly enough, on December 17, many residents in Sudbury opened their mailboxes to find a taxpayer-funded mail-out from the federal NDP member on Sudbury's parliamentary budget.

Acting Premier, do you think it's appropriate for the member to send out a mailer if, as you claim, the Premier made the decision to appoint him in November?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. I will be extremely tight in my expectation of bringing attention when I stand. If it continues, we'll get straight to naming.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let's speak about the track record of the member from Sudbury. While he was in Ottawa, he advocated for greater retirement security, enhanced consumer protection and significant investments in the Ring of Fire. These are all issues and expertise that he brings to Ontario. As an MPP, he's been appointed the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, where he'll work on the defining issue of our generation. Yesterday he was in attendance at the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada conference, advocating for Sudbury's mineral exploration and development industry.

He is a very, very strong voice for Sudbury, and that's why the people of Sudbury sent him to Queen's Park.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: Back again to the Acting Premier: If Mr. Thibeault knew on November 30 that he was running for you, as the Premier has said over and over and over again—if that's true, it's absolutely unethical, an abuse of his parliamentary budget and taxpayers' dollars to promote himself that close to stepping down and running at a different level.

Acting Premier, do you support Mr. Thibeault's use of taxpayers' money to promote himself if he was already your candidate?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark will come to order.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, this morning, I had a little glimmer of hope that things were changing in the PC Party, because the member from Whitby—Oshawa said, “For too long, our party has been out of touch with everyday Ontarians.” I agree with the member from Whitby—Oshawa. She said, “For too long, we focused on identifying problems instead of providing solutions.” I agree with the member from Whitby—Oshawa.

This is what gave me hope. This is what she said: “Well that changes today. Today is a new day. Today, all of us here, this team, we have a new attitude and a new plan.”

I was hoping for new questions, Speaker.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. I remind all members: When I stand, everyone sits. I also remind the government side that when I ask you to be seated, you are to be seated.

New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Acting Premier. Yesterday, the government caucus voted against our motion asking for the simple recognition that the Premier's office must be above suspicion, and a commitment that we preserve the integrity of Ontario's highest political office.

It's shameful that the Liberal government continues to protect Liberal fundraiser Gerry Lougheed Jr. and the Premier's deputy chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, in the face of serious allegations that they offered bribes to convince someone not to run for office.

Acting Premier, despite precedents and expectations that these individuals be stripped of their taxpayer-paid positions until the accusations are resolved, you and your government and your Premier continue to refuse to take the honourable and right action. Your refusal to even acknowledge the dark cloud cast on democracy begs the question: What are you trying to hide?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Premier and our entire caucus take this matter very seriously, and the Premier has spoken to that repeatedly.

The investigation is independent of this House. The investigation is being conducted by competent people who actually know how to conduct investigations. Elections Ontario determined that the allegations against the Premier and the member from Sudbury were baseless. However, we will continue to co-operate fully, Speaker.

I actually agree with the PC House leader when he said, "Stop interfering in an ongoing investigation, and let it run its course."

When asked about charges laid against a PC staff member this week, the PC member from Whitby-Oshawa said, "I really don't have a comment ... on this because it's before the courts."

Even this morning, when she was asked about that, she said, "I'm leaving it in the hands of the police and the justice system to continue their investigation and I'm confident that they will reach"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: When something wrong happens on this side of the House, we suspend the member. The member steps aside. In this case, that staff member stepped aside.

Why don't you learn? When I was Minister of Health, I stepped aside for 10 weeks when someone on my staff said something stupid to a Globe and Mail reporter. There was absolutely no accusation of criminal wrongdoing. There was no breach of the Election Act.

You've got an OPP officer who swore in an affidavit that you broke the law in trying to bribe Mr. Olivier. You've got the Chief Electoral Officer going as far as he—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I can't accept that. I'd ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Mr. Jim Wilson:—allegation that you broke the law: I think the OPP officer deserves some respect. She wouldn't have sworn on an affidavit if she didn't have reason to believe that the law has been breached; ditto with the Chief Electoral Officer. As you know, he has gone as far as he can in his powers. He is recommending that the OPP look at this, and that's exactly what they're doing.

Do the right thing, and step aside. Tell us today you're going to do the right thing.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Deputy Premier?

1050

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, if we want to talk about the member's record, let's go back to 1998, when former NDP MPP Floyd Laughren resigned his seat to become chair of the Ontario Energy Board. Let me quote from the Hamilton Spectator: "Veteran MPP Floyd Laughren, the former New Democrat finance minister, is calling it quits to accept a \$120,000 a year government appointment." Who was energy minister? Who appointed that member? None other than the current interim leader of the official opposition. If we want to talk about your record, let's talk about your record.

To make it worse, the Leader of the Opposition was asked to explain how this could have happened, and his answer was, "If you're looking for logic in this business, you're in the wrong place."

Well, we are looking for logic, Speaker, and we are looking to let the investigation happen outside this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

I would ask the member from Renfrew to let me do that job, whether I sit up or stand up, whatever. I'll do it.

Mr. John Yakubski: I wanted a government appointment as their choreographer.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not prepared to engage anyone in a conversation.

Final supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: They mention the case of Floyd Laughren—back to the Acting Premier: I think you owe Mr. Laughren an apology. The chronology in that case was, Mr. Laughren had stepped down from office. He was eminently qualified to be chair of the Ontario Energy Board, and he was appointed some months later, after he stepped down from office and voluntarily left this place. You owe him an apology. And I hate to admit it, but he actually did a really good job as chair of the Ontario Energy Board, and we were all very proud of him, even though he wasn't much of a Treasurer.

When Greg Sorbara stepped down for simply being named in a warrant, he said this: "A rather serious mistake has been made, but the interests of our government are greater than the interests of my personal career as

finance minister.” Now, I didn’t always agree with Mr. Sorbara, but that’s a class act. Why don’t you show some class, dismiss these individuals—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Deputy Premier?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Perhaps you could turn around and speak to the woman behind you, the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock, who resigned her seat in 2009 and accepted a paid position on the same day. The Sudbury Star reported, “Scott Trades Seat for Head Office Job.” PC “Laurie Scott was given the job Friday of getting the opposition ready for the next election in exchange for giving up her seat in the Ontario Legislature.”

We have no idea who had conversations with whom. She may very well have stepped down voluntarily. But would she have been willing to do that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville, the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and the member from Prince Edward–Hastings will come to order—second time.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I know we can’t always trust PC math, but we’ve seen the numbers, and we wonder, who is stepping down for Patrick Brown?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Deputy Premier. The Liberals are trying to rewrite history. Yesterday, the Premier insisted it was common knowledge that she was going to appoint Glenn Thibeault in November. Horse feathers, Speaker. On December 12, Gerry Loughheed said to Andrew Olivier, “The Premier up to now, has always said to me, she’s in favour” of nomination races. “So I want to make that really clear, she’s never said to me, ‘I want to appoint him’,” and, “to be fair to Glenn, Glenn has never said, ‘I want to be appointed.’” This isn’t rhetoric or spin. It’s the Premier’s Liberal kingmaker on tape.

When will the Liberals start telling the truth about the Sudbury bribery scandal?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As the Premier has said time and time and time again, she made the decision when she met Glenn Thibeault that he was going to be the candidate.

You know what? She wasn’t the only one who thought that Glenn Thibeault would be an excellent candidate. Let me read the editorial from Northern Life. This is what they had to say:

“We say elect Glenn Thibeault. He’s a seasoned politician with deep roots in the community, whose skills put him head and shoulders above the other candidates.

He has been a very effective constituency man, an articulate member of the opposition and past executive director of United Way.

“Thibeault will be working for the government in power, and we believe he’ll make a difference.... Sudbury is the mining capital of the world and we need to be plugged into government to maximize our economic growth and sustainability.”

So it wasn’t just the Premier who thought he would be the best candidate. The people of Sudbury made that decision.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yesterday, the Premier stood up and insisted that she’s been answering questions for weeks. It’s true that the Premier has stood up and she has talked, but she hasn’t actually answered a single thing. This is a really important question. There’s no spin. There is nothing complicated. It isn’t a trick question. The question is pretty straight up: Who told Pat Sorbara and Gerry Loughheed to offer Andrew Olivier a job?

Gerry Loughheed says it was the Premier. I’m asking the Deputy Premier now: Who was it?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The leader of the NDP knows full well that it’s not appropriate to comment on a police investigation. In fact, on December 11 last year, the leader of the NDP held a press conference at the media studio right here at Queen’s Park. She was questioned then on criminal allegations against an NDP candidate. Allow me to read to you what the leader of the third party said during this press conference:

“Right now, this is a matter that’s in front of the police.... I can’t talk about the details at this point because the police are investigating.” The member was asked question after question, many by Richard Brennan, but refused to answer. She was asked 14 times, and then what did she say? She said, “I’m not going to talk about this any longer. I’ve said to you what I need to say. The police are investigating the matter.”

The NDP keep asking, week after week, questions about a matter before the police. I think the leader—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I am disgusted that the Deputy Premier—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I am disgusted that the Deputy Premier would actually raise an issue of a woman who complained about sexual harassment and try to get me to talk about someone’s personal sexual harassment case. That’s what that was all about. Shame on you, as the Deputy Premier, to raise that in this House. Shame on you.

We all know that the Premier—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No. It’s from all sides. Order, please. Thank you.

Finish, please.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: We all know that not her chief of staff, her campaign director, her Sudbury kingmaker, Sudbury's former riding association president, Andrew Olivier, Glenn Thibeault, the OPP, Elections Ontario or any of the other evidence we've seen backs up the Premier's story. Can the confidante of the Premier, the Deputy Premier, actually back up this story of the Premier's version of events?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I would like to point out that I was not the one who mentioned anything to do with the allegation other than to say that the leader of the third party was asked repeatedly about a matter that was under police investigation, and she repeatedly refused to answer the question because it was under police investigation. It is exactly what they have been subjecting the Premier to week after week.

Let me quote again—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It goes both ways.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's not helpful when I stand and it continues.

1100

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Don't we have a committee going on right now on sexual harassment?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. Order, please. Wrap up, please.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me remind you what the leader of the third party said about a matter that was in front of the police: "Right now this is a matter that's in front of the police ... I can't talk about the details ... because the police"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Deputy Premier. There are taped calls. There are police warrants. There are letters and an independent report from Elections Ontario. They all say that Andrew Olivier was offered a bribe. Instead of answering plain questions, Ontarians get the same response, day after day, and yet today, another new low by the Liberals in terms of this discussion.

I ask the Deputy Premier, the Premier's closest confidante: When was the Deputy Premier told; when was she told that there would be no nomination meeting? Was it before or after the bribery attempts were made?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I, for one, am delighted that Glenn Thibeault decided to leave the NDP and join the Liberal Party. He made a very good decision, and the people of Sudbury made the decision to send him to Queen's Park. There are many reasons that they did that.

I think that the Northern Life editorial says it best: "He's a seasoned politician with deep roots in the community, whose skills put him head and shoulders above the other candidates. He has been a very effective

constituency man, an articulate member of the opposition and past executive director of United Way.

"Thibeault will be working for the government in power ... we believe he'll make a difference ... Sudbury is the mining capital of the world and we need to be plugged into government to maximize our economic growth and sustainability."

The people of Sudbury spoke.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Ontarians deserve to know who gave the order to offer Andrew Olivier a job. The Liberals have been asked this question 50 times, and we have 50 responses but zero answers.

It's not complicated: Who was making the decisions in the Sudbury bribery scandal?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Economic Development, come to order. Thank you.

Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know that this will get the leader of the third party angry, but do you know what? I have to go back and quote her own words back to her: "I can't talk about the details at this point because the police are investigating."

She was pushed. She was pushed hard. Fourteen times she was asked the question, and finally she said—she said; the Premier has not said this—"I'm not going to talk about this any longer. I've said to you what I need to say. The police are investigating the matter," and shut down the conversation.

Speaker, she knows full well that when an issue is before the police, then comments are not appropriate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Premier, this is the third week that we've been trying to get answers about the bribery scandal that happened in Sudbury. Instead, Ontarians see the Premier and the Deputy Premier playing games, slinging muck, refusing to answer questions.

Somebody was making the decisions in the Sudbury bribery scandal. The Deputy Premier was aware of the conversations that the Premier had with her soul. Was she aware of any conversations the Premier had with anyone else about a nomination meeting being cancelled in Sudbury?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm tempted to ask the leader of the third party why she didn't respond to the questions that were asked to her about a criminal investigation. I would also like to know why they are not asking questions about poverty. Why are they not asking questions about homelessness? Why are they not asking questions about insurance? Why are they not asking questions about economic growth? Why are they not asking questions about health care? There are many, many issues.

On this side of the House, we're working hard to address the needs of the people of this province. I think it would be refreshing to have a real policy question instead of another—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews:—question, Speaker.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Acting Premier. Just like the gas plants scandal, it's the deputy chief of staff at the centre of OPP allegations. This time, it's allegations in the Sudbury bribery scandal, and it's her words that will be your Premier's undoing.

The Premier stated that she made the decision to appoint the Sudbury candidate in late November, but in December, Pat Sorbara said "She's"—meaning the Premier—"gonna"—that's a future tense, and that's very critical. "She's gonna have to make a decision around the appointment." The tape doesn't lie. On December 12, she hadn't yet made her decision.

Acting Premier, will you admit that the Premier's version and the version found on the tape are quite different?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I appreciate the question, but as I said earlier, I was really, really hoping that the members of the PC caucus would listen to one of their own, the member from Whitby-Oshawa, who said this morning, "For too long, our party has been out of touch with everyday Ontarians." Would we agree? I think we would agree with that. "For too long, we focused on identifying problems instead of providing solutions." Then she said, and this is what gave me hope—the member who you, I believe, are supporting for leader said, "Well, that changes today. Today is a new day. Today, all of us here, this team, we have a new attitude and a new plan." I thought we might see that reflected in question period today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Again to the Acting Premier: Just because she's talking doesn't mean she's answering. This is just like the gas plants scandal all over, where Liberal operatives said one thing, but recovered emails previously deleted clearly laid out the truth. This time, it's your operatives' words which were caught on tape.

Gerry Lougheed went through a hypothetical scenario with Andrew Olivier on December 11—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I'm going to continue to ask for decorum. I will continue to ask all members to race to the top.

Finish your question, please.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Speaking as if he were Olivier, Lougheed says on the tape, "What are you giving me ... to step down...? Otherwise ... I'm gonna go sell memberships and see what my chances are." Mr. Olivier would not be told that he could still sell memberships if a decision had already been made in December, like the Premier claims. She's been snared by her own story, which is opposite the tape's.

Deputy Premier, will you admit the Premier misled this House?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. The—

Mr. Todd Smith: Same old story.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings, second time.

Please withdraw.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I can tell the member opposite that the Premier of this province, the leader of the Ontario Liberal Party, is a woman of enormous integrity. She is telling the absolute truth. In fact, she is a woman who thought through very clearly what she needed to do.

She is a woman who is building a strong government. She wanted a voice from Sudbury in government. She wanted Glenn Thibeault on this side of the House, working for the people of Sudbury. What she did is, when she met him in Sudbury, she said, "This is the man I know I want in my caucus." She decided at that time that he would be the candidate, and then he went on to become the member.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Stormont, come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It was a hard-fought election. I'm sorry the PC Party lost their deposit, but that's how it goes sometimes. But he's a strong candidate, and he is a strong member.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings, withdraw.

Mr. Todd Smith: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Integrity? She broke the law, Speaker. I don't see integrity in that.

Anyway, my question is to the Acting Premier. Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed are on tape offering Andrew Olivier anything he wants in order to get out of the way, offering him what the OPP and Elections Ontario have described as a bribe. But it doesn't stop there. Pat Sorbara told Andrew Olivier that he's the third person the Premier has called in order to push aside a potential candidate.

1110

Can the Deputy Premier tell this House who else the Premier has pushed aside and what rewards the Premier offered them?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I hate to go back to Scarborough-Guildwood, but I think we have to go back to Scarborough-Guildwood. You might remember there was a by-election there in 2013. The NDP had a very fine candidate who wanted the nomination, Amarjeet Kaur Chhabra—

Mr. Paul Miller: The NDP had a nomination meeting. No comparison.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek, come to order.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —a very highly respected person in that community, and who the leader of the third party decided she wanted to run there was Adam Giambrone. So instead of having a clean appointment, she chose to run what—I'm not going to say this, but others do. The president of the NDP Scarborough–Guildwood riding association, Viresh Raghubeer, said to the Toronto Star, “I am very disappointed. We are confident that things need to be investigated further and we needed further proof as to what happened at the nomination meeting. Whenever you try to speak about democracy in the party”—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: It was called a nomination, and Adam Giambrone did the work that you do as a candidate seeking nomination. He got more votes. That was the story. But my question back—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Throw them all out.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are some people I can start with. Thank you.

Please finish.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The Deputy Premier can try to deflect as much as she wants. After offering Andrew Olivier anything he wanted so he'd get out of the way and Glenn Thibeault could have an uncontested nomination that the Premier wanted, Pat Sorbara told Andrew Olivier, “By the way ... you're ... the third person I've ever heard” the Premier “even ask this of.”

I ask you again: Who are those people and what did she offer?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let's go back to 2013, the Scarborough–Guildwood by-election and the candidate, Amarjeet Kaur Chhabra. According to media reports, an independent probe into this nomination was overruled by the central party, leading the president of the NDP Scarborough–Guildwood riding association to say—and let me repeat—“I am very disappointed. We are confident that things need to be investigated further and we needed further proof as to what happened in the nomination meeting. Whenever you try to speak about democracy (in the party) you are demonized.”

Viresh Raghubeer, the president of the riding association, is saying that speaking about democracy makes you demonized in the Ontario New Democratic Party.

TRUCKING SAFETY

Ms. Harinder Malhi: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. Last fall, there were some concerns raised regarding the testing and training of those who drive commercial vehicles. While I understand that safety is our government's number one priority, those living in

Brampton–Springdale want to know what measures are in place to ensure that truck drivers are being properly trained.

Can the Minister of Transportation please confirm whether our government is committed to developing the mandatory truck driver training?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by thanking my colleague the member from Brampton–Springdale for the leadership that she is showing in her community. This is an example of that kind of leadership.

Thank goodness I've got a real question on a transportation issue. Let me first mention that we've actually seen the number of fatalities and collisions involving large trucks decline by 41% between 2002 and 2011. This is a remarkable statistic, but we know there is always more that can be done to improve road safety. That's why both myself and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities made a commitment last fall to develop a system that ensures mandatory truck driver training is in place.

We've already taken tangible steps towards that goal. On February 18, MTO led the first official consultations on mandatory truck driver training, and on February 25 I was pleased to attend a round table with the Truck Training Schools Association of Ontario. We are committed to moving forward with this mandatory truck driver training, and we are putting in the work to make sure it happens.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I want to thank the minister for his response. I'm very happy to hear that our government is committed to developing a mandatory truck driver training regime.

The minister mentioned that our government has already taken tangible steps forward on this important issue. Those living in my constituency of Brampton–Springdale will be pleased to hear that our government has been consulting with industry leaders, but I'm certain that they would want to hear more about the details of these consultations.

Mr. Speaker, can I ask the minister to please tell members of the House more about the consultations that have been conducted to develop mandatory truck driver training in Ontario?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the member from Brampton–Springdale for the supplementary. I was very pleased to attend the Truck Training Schools Association of Ontario round table last week. Over 100 individuals representing enforcement, municipal and industry organizations were in attendance at that event.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark, come to order.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Our government is committed to working together to develop a system that will give Ontarians the confidence to know that commercial drivers are getting the training they need to succeed on our roads. We will get the best results by hearing directly from those working on the front lines, whether it's

carriers, instructors or insurance providers. That's why round tables like the one I attended are so incredibly important. Together, we can and we will deliver a robust program to measure competency and administer mandatory training for commercial truck drivers. We will work to get it right, and we'll find a standard that keeps us at the forefront of road and highway safety in North America.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is to the Acting Premier. On September 25, your leader and the cabinet made a trip to the great city of Sudbury. On that same trip, Gerry Lougheed Jr. hosted a \$1,750-a-plate fundraiser for you and your cabinet ministers. Was anything promised to Mr. Lougheed in return for his loyalty to the Ontario Liberal Party?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think it's important that the member from Simcoe—Grey probably wants to correct his record, Speaker. I have a Broadcast News release here from Wednesday, January 28, 1998. It says: "Former NDP Treasurer Floyd Laughren has been appointed to chair the Ontario Energy Board effective March 1. Energy Minister Jim Wilson made the announcement today. Laughren is the current longest-serving member of Queen's Park."

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I listened very carefully. Truthfully, I'm trying to allow this weaving in and out. I need to have this woven into an answer.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm just wanting the member to correct his record, but I can do that a little bit later, Speaker.

The leader of the Ontario Liberal Party, the Premier of Ontario, made a decision to appoint Glenn Thibeault to be our candidate in the Sudbury by-election. The people of Sudbury endorsed that decision and elected him, and we are delighted that he is here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Let's get back to the question that was asked. We all understand the importance of loyalty, but there comes a point when integrity must trump all. Staff and people are loyal because they do exactly what is asked of them. Is that the real reason your leader is so loyal to Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed, because they did exactly what she asked them to do when they spoke to Mr. Olivier on her behalf?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the innuendo and the—it's beneath the dignity of this House that people would impugn the integrity of someone. I think it's also important to remind people that the police are investigating, so the Premier and others have to leave that investigation to those experts outside this House who are conducting the investigation.

I think the member opposite would be interested to know that Mr. Lougheed has also donated—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Dufferin—Caledon, come to order; a second time, and you asked the question.

Hon. Deborah Matthews:—and again in 2011—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Dufferin—Caledon is warned.

Carry on.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Gerry Lougheed is a very generous person. I think people in Sudbury—I bet even the member from Nickel Belt would acknowledge that he is a community leader and very generous. His generosity extends to the Conservative Party with donations to the Conservative Party. I don't think you're looking for anything from him either.

1120

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Acting Premier. Pat Sorbara is on tape telling Andrew Olivier that the Premier has pushed aside other people in the past and potentially offered them incentives. Has Pat Sorbara been instructed to tell the police who these people are?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the member is a lawyer. The member knows exactly what can be said and what cannot be said. The member opposite knows that the police investigation must be conducted outside of this House. It is not just the leader of the third party who knows that when a matter is before the police, there are limits to comments you can make; the member from Brampton also knows it.

The leader said, "I am not going to talk about this any longer. I've said to you what I need to say. The police are investigating this matter." Speaker, they know that these questions are inappropriate, and I would welcome a question on auto insurance.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I think members in this House know full well that the job of the opposition is to hold the government to account, and that is what we will do.

The Premier has pushed aside at least two other people in the past. She has dealt with these other two people the same way she's dealt with Mr. Olivier. At least, that's what Pat Sorbara told Andrew Olivier in the taped phone call that we have.

Has Pat Sorbara been told to tell investigators exactly who these people are and what they were offered?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I have said many times, this investigation is independent of this government and of this House. We would welcome, we are begging for, questions on policy issues that matter to the people of this province. There are people here from Leamington who, I know, have questions for the Minister of Health.

We're begging you, pleading with you, to please ask a substantive question that relates to government policy.

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, my question, through you, is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Minister, the people in this province are interested in and excited about the government's local food strategy. In my riding of Northumberland—Quinte West, there are great opportunities to support local producers and promote local food, like the Cobourg Farmers' Market. We know that more consumption of local food is better for our health and supportive of our local agricultural community and economy. I know that through the Local Food Act, our government continues to promote the good things that are grown and harvested across the province.

Speaker, would the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs please provide an update on proclamations under the Local Food Act?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Speaker, let me tell you, that was an outstanding question from the member for Northumberland—Quinte West on a very important policy in terms of local food.

We know that buying local food supports our communities. It helps dollars circulate locally, creates jobs and helps our agri-food sector. That's why we introduced the Local Food Act. I want to pay tribute to the member from Sarnia—Lambton on the tax credit to donate to local food banks. That has been a great success.

I know the member from Northumberland—Quinte West, along with Diane, goes to the farmers' market in Cobourg every Saturday with their grandkids—a great event for them.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to say that a number of our supply management groups are now helping food banks in Ontario. The Chicken Farmers of Ontario has set an annual donation target of 100,000 chickens per year. The Dairy Farmers of Ontario, the Ontario Dairy Council and the Ontario Milk Transport Association contribute over one billion litres of milk every year. And my good friends the Egg Farmers of Ontario, through a new program, will provide 12,000 dozen eggs—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Thank you to the minister for that answer.

The food donation tax credit is an integral part of our government's commitment to support farmers, increase access to nutritious locally grown food and promote the good things that are grown right across the province.

But minister, with more local food available, it's important that Ontarians understand how and when to access this great food. Part of the Local Food Act requires the government to set aspirational food literacy goals and targets. Not only will food literacy support local food, but it will also promote growth and build opportunities for our agri-food sector.

Speaker, can the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs please update the House on the status of these targets?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank my good friend from Northumberland—Quinte West for the supplementary.

You sense his excitement when he is going to the Cobourg Farmers' Market every Saturday.

This has allowed us to develop a closer relationship, understanding our local food. That is why, under the Local Food Act, we recently announced a set of targets to encourage and increase food literacy across this wonderful province. We want to increase the number of Ontarians who (1) know what local foods are available, (2) know how and where to obtain local foods, (3) prepare local food meals for family and friends—even meals for the opposition and new friends. They want to make local food more available through food service providers.

We all win when food literacy improves. Mr. Speaker, setting these goals is a very exciting step forward. It's healthy for Ontarians. And see the member at the Cobourg Farmers' Market this Saturday.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I am hanging in. I am going to ask and remind members that it is not convention to use people's names. Quite frankly, it doesn't elevate the debate; it lowers it. Please refer to members by either their titles or their ridings.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Gerry Lougheed has been described as a king-maker, as a renowned fundraiser and as a long-time Liberal Party operative. It is apparent he has the ear of your Premier and her inner circle. As such, he had the prerogative to offer appointments, jobs or whatever entitlements to Mr. Olivier.

Deputy Premier, outside of this case, and Andrew Olivier not included, has Gerry Lougheed Jr. ever approached any other individual about a legal appointment on behalf of the Premier?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member for Beaches—East York: second time.

Deputy Premier?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I said earlier, Gerry Lougheed Jr. is an outstanding member of the Sudbury community. He is extraordinarily generous personally, and he has also spearheaded fundraising campaigns for many causes, including the hospital there. Even the member from Timmins—James Bay says he's a great guy.

I just want to go back to the situation when Floyd Laughren resigned his seat to become chair of the Ontario Energy Board. We heard from the former Minister of Energy, the member from Simcoe—Grey, that he resigned his seat before he was appointed, and, actually, history does not bear that out.

This news release I started to read said he "has been appointed chair effective March 1. Jim Wilson made the announcement today. He is expected to announce his resignation from the Legislature later today in Sudbury." So I am sure the member opposite will want to correct his record.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Again to the Deputy Premier: There is no doubt Gerry Lougheed Jr. is well connected in Sudbury. That fact stands. And as the Deputy Premier just said, Mr. Lougheed felt—he is very generous, but not with provincial appointments. But he felt he could make calls to individuals on behalf of the Premier. There is no indication the Premier herself did or said anything to stop or deny him that entitlement.

Separate from this ongoing bribery investigation case, has the Premier ever before acted on the recommendation of friend Gerry Lougheed Jr. in appointing individuals to one of the province's agencies, boards or commissions?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, as I said before, Gerry Lougheed Jr. is an outstanding member of the community in Sudbury. He has been supportive not just of the Liberal Party, but the Conservative Party as well.

I do want to go back to the question of who is going to step down for Patrick Brown. There is a history of members resigning their seats for a new leader. David Tilson—

Interjections.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. As I've tried to indicate to members on a constant basis, I am truly trying to listen carefully to all of the responses and questions. I'm also going to indicate to you that it does get bothersome and tiresome that people are trying to tell me how to do the job.

Most of all, for the sake of all of you, I think we need to move the level up, for me to hear. I'm hearing these interjections on an ongoing basis back and forth, even when persons are trying to put a question. You're not helping me at all, and I wouldn't mind your help.

I'm going to ask the member to again focus on the answer. Thank you.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, this is an issue that has been discussed to the exclusion of every other issue in the province of Ontario for the past three weeks. I find it interesting that the member opposite isn't asking about his hospital in Markdale. I'm surprised he isn't asking for an update on that terrific announcement that the Minister of Health made, an issue that affects every person in his community.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Catherine Fife: My question is to the Deputy Premier. The Liberal government is now facing four OPP anti-rackets branch investigations. Does the Deputy Premier think this is acceptable for the people of this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As my colleague the member from Ottawa Centre has said, it's hard when you get two black eyes. You get one black eye because a member of your party has crossed to another party, and it's another black eye—and that hurts—when you lose a seat that you hold. We actually have had this experience ourselves. We know it hurts when you lose a seat. But two black eyes, we understand, are hard to take.

The people of Sudbury have spoken. The people of Sudbury had access to those tapes that were on Facebook and YouTube through the campaign. The people of Sudbury chose Glenn Thibeault.

Northern Life had, I think, a very illuminating editorial on February 2. They said, "We say elect Glenn Thibeault. He's a seasoned politician with deep roots in the community, whose skills put him head and shoulders above the other candidates."

The people of Sudbury have spoken, and we're glad they did.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Again to the Deputy Premier: You will remember that the police investigated Rob Ford for Project Traveller and Project Brazen 2. This Premier is now facing twice as many police investigations as Rob Ford. More is not better, in this regard. And now the Liberals have hired Rob Ford's chief of staff, because maybe they're hoping he knows a thing or two about politicians and their trusted insiders facing down the police.

Is the Deputy Premier proud that the Liberal government has one-upped Rob Ford when it comes to police investigations?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'm delighted that the member has weighed in on this. I sure would be interested in knowing her story about her nomination when she decided to run for the NDP. All of us have stories about our nominations. On our side of the House, we have to fight for our nominations. I actually had a contested nomination in 2003. Many of us had contested nominations.

I'm not sure what the NDP constitution has to say about appointments. I do understand they do not allow appointments but they have other ways of ensuring certain candidates do get uncontested nominations.

So there is a certain degree of hypocrisy that has been expressed in this House—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member will withdraw.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Han Dong: My question is for the Attorney General. Upholding and ensuring equal access to the justice system is a very important element to the people in the province of Ontario.

After the ministers' mandate letters were made public prior to the last session, I noticed that ensuring access to justice was a priority for the office of the Attorney General. A number of constituents in Trinity-Spadina have been reading the news about a bill she introduced in the past session. The Protection of Public Participation Act generated a positive response from the members of the legal community in that it addresses the issue of equal access to justice and ensures the equality of the justice

system. Personally, I am curious to know how this bill accomplishes this very difficult task.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the Attorney General: Could she please elaborate on how Bill 52 ensures access to justice for every member of this province?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank the member from Trinity–Spadina. He brings a very, very important question. He is a great representative of his riding and we welcome him to Queen's Park.

The Protection of Public Participation Act is a very important step in ensuring access to justice, because it aims to eliminate what are called "strategic lawsuits." These types of lawsuits are designed to silence public participation rather than being based on legitimate concerns. Using intimidation tactics to silence one's opponents is a misuse of our court system—one of the central institutions of a fair and democratic society. By protecting citizens against strategic litigation, our government is protecting the right of Ontario residents to speak out on matters that are important to us.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Han Dong: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Attorney General for informing this House of how Bill 52 is working for Ontarians in keeping the justice system open, accessible and democratic. It is great to hear that progress is being made in this area. My constituents and I were very disappointed when a similar piece of legislation, Bill 83, died on the order paper when the last general election was called.

However, I would appreciate it if the Attorney General could clarify some of the details within the bill itself. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Attorney General: Could she please elaborate on what a "strategic lawsuit" is and clarify how this bill would work if it were to be passed in this Legislature?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank again the member from Trinity–Spadina. On this side of the House, we're not used to having a member from Trinity–Spadina, so welcome again.

I want to thank him for his question, as the definition of "strategic lawsuit" can be difficult to understand. Strategic lawsuits are launched to silence potential critics rather than to obtain a remedy for harm done by a particular criticism. This can come in the form of financial intimidation by threatening a long, often expensive lawsuit that ultimately silences an individual or group's opinion. This legislation balances the protection of public participation and freedom of expression against the protection of reputation and economic interests.

Monsieur Speaker, this bill was debated this morning in the House. I can sense that there is the support of the two parties. Let's get the bill to committee.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is to the Acting Premier.

Acting Premier, I've had the privilege of serving in this Legislature for many years. I have served with many

honourable members, members who didn't wait to step aside when their integrity was being called into question.

The Premier said that Sorbara and Loughheed didn't offer their resignations. A lot of time has passed since then. Acting Premier, at any time since the scandal broke, have either Sorbara or Loughheed offered their resignation?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Well, Speaker, for a moment I thought the member wanted to talk about the new hospital in Woodstock, but I understand that any issues of policy are not being permitted by your head office there.

What I can tell you is that this investigation is independent of government. This investigation is independent of this House. The investigation is under way. There is full co-operation with the investigation. We take it very seriously and are co-operating fully.

I want to remind the member of what the Chief Electoral Officer clearly stated. He said, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

I welcome the question. I do think, though, that the people of Oxford county have other questions they'd like their member to be asking.

1140

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Again, my question is to the Acting Premier. I want to say the reason I asked this question is because I wanted this question answered.

The evidence is continuing to mount against Ms. Sorbara and Gerry Loughheed. When I served in government, our staff was held accountable. They knew that when they were in the wrong, they were going to have to pay the price.

Acting Premier, is your government culture so arrogant that your staff knows they can avoid accountability?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Deputy Premier?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Our Premier demands the highest level of ethics and accountability of her staff and of her caucus. The attacks on the Premier are, I think, unseemly. There is an investigation under way. The Premier has been extremely forthcoming about what she said, to the extent that she released a statement that she had written three weeks ago. She's been very clear about her position. She's been very clear that she will co-operate fully with the investigation.

But again, I say, is this really the only question that people in Ontario want asked in this House?

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Michael Mantha: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. My question is pretty simple, and it's to the minister.

Pat Sorbara, Gerry Loughheed, Andrew Olivier, Glenn Thibeault, the OPP and Elections Ontario all have a

version of the Sudbury bribery scandal. The Premier has another. Who is telling the truth?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The Premier is telling the truth.

This marks the last opposition question and another week in the Ontario Legislature, another week where no questions of substance were asked by any of the members of the opposition. We have people from Leamington who are here today because they want answers to questions. But this question period, like all others, has not addressed the questions of people who come to the Legislature. They've come from Leamington to be here to get answers from the Minister of Health.

I don't understand why local members are not asking questions that are important to their constituents. I don't understand why critics are not asking questions that relate to the area that they are criticizing.

Speaker, we will continue to answer questions, but we will continue to answer the questions with the same answers we've been giving for three weeks.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again to the Deputy Premier: I'll take it a step slower. The Premier says she made an appointment in November. The Premier's own letter, her campaign director, her kingmaker, her former candidate and the riding association all say, "Nope. No decision." Not everyone can be right. Who is telling the truth?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the question that the member—

Hon. Charles Sousa: Really slow.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The question that the member is asking is, when did the Premier communicate her decision? She has been very clear that she made the decision to have Glenn Thibeault as our candidate when she met him. She was very clear that she wanted him to be the candidate, and so did the people of Sudbury.

But if the opposition won't ask the question, let me answer what's happening at the obstetrics at Leamington. An expert panel was convened to closely examine the issue—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, but to the question.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I know the member is not from Leamington. He is not the member from Leamington.

RING OF FIRE CERCLE DE FEU

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. As many of you know, the annual prospectors and developers convention just wrapped up in Toronto yesterday. We are certainly proud that Ontario is home to this world-renowned event for the mineral industry.

After not going for many years personally, I was pleased to join the Premier and the Minister of Northern Development and Mines, along with several caucus members, at the Ontario reception earlier this week. The

reception welcomed hundreds of municipal, First Nations and industry representatives, and students, all with a keen interest in Ontario's mineral development industry. In fact, all members should consider attending.

Our province is blessed with an array of natural resources. Can the minister please share the recent investments our government has made in the Ring of Fire?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want to thank the member for Kingston and the Islands for the question. It was just wonderful to see her and so many other caucus members at the Ontario government reception. PDAC was indeed a tremendous success. It gave our government the right platform to discuss the many exciting investment opportunities in the mining sector in the province.

After Premier Wynne and Prime Minister Harper met earlier in January, I got the chance to go to Ottawa to meet with federal Natural Resources Minister Rickford. It was at that meeting that we discussed very precise opportunities for collaboration and progress on the Ring of Fire.

At PDAC this past week, the first very strong fruits of that labour were us being able to jointly announce more than \$750,000 to support economic development and community access for a number of communities in the region—just a great announcement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to thank the minister for his response. I agree with the minister: It was clear to me that there is a keen interest in our province's mineral sector.

Il est clair que l'attention au Cercle de feu n'est pas seulement un sujet national; c'est une découverte minérale qui suscite l'intérêt du monde entier.

The Ring of Fire has tremendous potential to spur economic development, create thousands of jobs and significantly strengthen our province's economy for many years to come. I was particularly pleased to see so many First Nations representatives attending the conference, something I do not recall when I visited in past years.

We are also glad to see the federal government taking steps to become engaged with the Ring of Fire with us. Can the minister please share how this joint investment will help to foster private sector investment and sustainable development in the Ring of Fire?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Indeed, it was very, very good to be able to see a matching investment from the federal government for this particular very special project. Obviously, we're looking forward to seeing far more significant investments, matching our great support.

This is a really great project. The investment we made and are sharing with the federal government is for the Webequie First Nation, in partnership with the Eabametoong, Neskantaga and Nibinamik First Nations, to complete a regional community service corridor study. This is really important in terms of moving the infrastructure needs forward in the Ring of Fire and, may I say, it builds on the progress that we've made on what I've spoken on often: the historic regional framework agreement that we signed with Matawa First Nations.

This lays the groundwork for First Nations to come together to explore options for a community service corridor that will lead to multi-generational benefits associated with resource development in the region.

USE OF QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke on a point of order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Speaker. Earlier—and I recognize your interjection there, and I apologize if you saw this the wrong way, but at no time would I ever imply that I was here to do your job. I wouldn't be able to do a very good job. You're doing a wonderful job, Speaker.

But I want to point out that in this House, it is the tradition that points of order won't be recognized during oral questions, so our only opportunity is sometimes to interject, and sometimes we get chastised for it and sometimes we certainly deserve it.

I do want to point out that on numerous occasions today, the Deputy Premier alluded to something that has not happened, may never happen, has nothing to do with the questions at hand, asking members of the opposition if they're going to resign their seats. That, in fact, is an inappropriate way of dealing with matters in this House. You should not be implying that members on this side of the House are intending to resign their seats. She's implying that, and I believe it to be absolutely inappropriate and wrong.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the member for his point of order. He has a point of order that does ask about the direction of question-and-answer period, which is absolutely legitimate.

The one thing I would say to him is that it may or may not be appropriate, but it's not out of order. The difference between the two is the fact that I have guided, in today's question period, some people to come back to answering the question.

I thank the member for his point of order.

The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington on a point of order.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'd like to just correct the record. Earlier, during question period, I made reference to a great theatrical performance. I forgot to include that it was the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's not a point of order.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands adjourned until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1151 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

VESAK DAY

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Mr. Speaker, I want to talk to you about Vesak Day. Visita Sirin Leelaratra is a valued

member of my constituency. Originally from Sri Lanka, he came to Canada in 1988 and has lived in my riding of Carleton–Mississippi Mills for 10 years. He is a proud and hard-working advocate for the Buddhist and multi-cultural community in the Ottawa area and successfully founded Vesak Day in Ottawa in 2013.

Vesak Day is the celebration of Buddha's birthday. As part of the celebration of Vesak Day, I ask people of all faiths to join me at Ottawa City Hall on May 2, 2015, at 12 o'clock noon, to celebrate the basic human values of compassion, kindness and the spirit of forgiveness.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Catherine Fife: I'm proud to rise today to speak about International Women's Day, which we will be celebrating this Sunday, March 8. While it is important to take time to celebrate the achievements of women, it is just as, if not more, important to recognize the efforts of those in our communities who are working hard to combat, among other injustices, violence against women.

I want to acknowledge members of the University of Waterloo's Sigma Chi for making a public video calling out male violence against women on campuses and discouraging being a passive bystander.

I also want to acknowledge the faculty of social work at Wilfrid Laurier University, which is hosting a two-day symposium featuring Tatyana Fazlalizadeh, founder of the Stop Telling Women to Smile campaign.

I want to commend Ramah from Eastwood Collegiate, who has created a Friday girls' group for students who are not only new to the country but also new to attending school.

The work of each of these groups is very necessary and I commend their efforts.

As members, we spend so much time in this Legislature, away from our communities, that staying apprised of our local news is of the utmost importance.

This week, the front page of the Waterloo Record's local section has been dominated by stories of violence against women.

Kate Lynn Reid is missing. The police fear for her safety.

A man was sentenced this week for secretly filming women while they were in the washroom of his workplace.

Mary May's murderer was sentenced this week. Minutes before she died, she called her landlord to tell him what was happening. She had asked for help from her landlord, her city councillor and the police. She was killed by her roommate.

The trial for the 2007 murder of Denise Bourdeau still has not reached conclusion. Her family has not had closure for eight years.

In 2015, women are still far too likely to die at the hands of their intimate partner. We can do more; we must do more. On International Women's Day, we must stand together on this issue.

UNITED WAY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: It's my pleasure to congratulate the United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries on their spectacular campaign and results for 2015, which I was really pleased to celebrate with them at their annual community achievement night last week.

Last Thursday, the Holiday Inn in Cambridge graciously donated the space and sponsored the event, which celebrated all the best in people. It thanked donors to the United Way campaign, community volunteers who make such a difference, and the social service agencies who work daily to improve people's lives.

The event features an awards portion for some truly deserving candidates: inspiring people who give so generously of their time, like food bank and community centre volunteers; and companies and individuals who contribute their funds to empower programs.

There are awards for action, such as the action taken by social services who support thousands of our citizens.

The night culminated with the inspiring words of motivational speaker Bill Carr—and announced the incredible \$2.28 million that they raised this year, which will help thousands of our local residents.

The United Way and the support that they provide to our citizens work hand in hand with the role that our government plays in supporting all Ontarians.

Many folks came out last Thursday, making me very proud to represent this great community of Cambridge here at Queen's Park.

My thanks go out to Ron Dowhaniuk, CEO of United Way, and to board chair Jim Ramsay and their volunteers for the evening's and the campaign's success.

MUNICIPALITIES

Ms. Laurie Scott: Last week a number of the municipalities located in my riding of Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock attended the ROMA/OGRA conference. They arrived, again, looking for answers on a number of issues facing them but left feeling their hands were tied.

Haliburton county came to discuss the new OPP billing model, which has been described as "fair" and "equitable for all municipalities"; however, the numbers are in, and, as expected, the OPP billing increase will be hitting taxpayers hard. The formula will nearly double Haliburton county's collective OPP bill, without any service increases, from approximately \$3.3 million to approximately \$6.3 million. This year alone, residents will be looking at tax increases of nearly 11%, causing serious hardship to property owners.

Despite the county's best efforts in lobbying the government, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services failed to follow up, as he had promised, with the county of Haliburton before finalizing the proposed OPP billing model.

Time and time again, this government has shown a lack of respect for and unfairly punished municipalities because of the perception that they have deep pockets, due to the ability to raise property taxes.

This also rings true when discussing joint and several liability, which is an important issue to all municipalities. Despite previous statements that the government would fix this, they have reneged on that. A resolution calling for insurance reforms was passed by all parties in the Legislature, but now this has left all municipalities on the hook.

I appeal to the government to work with their partners in the municipal sector.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. John Vanthof: The Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada convention has just wrapped up in Toronto—PDAC, for those in the industry. And everyone knows that anybody who is anybody in the industry has to participate in PDAC.

In our area of northeastern Ontario, although we have a rich mining heritage and a solid industry right now and a very prosperous-looking future—we weren't very well represented. This was identified by a couple of our local municipal politicians: Reeve Terry Fiset of Elk Lake and Mayor George Lefebvre of Latchford.

They had a vision: Four years ago they rented a space off-site, they found some local companies that were willing to participate, specifically Nor-Arc Steel Fabricators in Earlton and Story Environmental. That little off-site space has morphed into, this year, one of the premier exhibits at PDAC. There were 55 exhibitors in the northern Ontario pavilion. The funding was from FedNor. They truly did us proud, and all the participants were very happy.

I would like to send a special thank you and note of appreciation to the organizers of this year's show, Marla Tremblay and James Franks, and the rest of the team. They did a fantastic job. It was really nice to see, among those 55 participants, Nor-Arc Steel Fabricators and Story Environmental—they were still there, they were there at the start. Terry Fiset and Mayor George Lefebvre were there as well. Congratulations. They did us proud.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, International Women's Day is quickly approaching. I'm pleased to rise today and share my experience at a fundraising gala I attended last night in Oakville.

The Dinner Party, co-hosted by the Women of Halton Action Movement and the Zonta Club of Oakville, brought together a hall full of intelligent, powerful and inspiring women and men for a night of food, entertainment and stimulating conversation. The event was a huge success, with proceeds going to support two very worthy causes: the Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Services and Canadians in Support of Afghan Women.

The highlight of the night was a surprise performance from the keynote speaker, Polaris Prize-winning Inuit throat singer Tanya Tagaq. She captivated the audience with her incredible vocal abilities and stories of her

traditional upbringing in Cambridge Bay. It was the perfect cap to an evening highlighting the importance of gender equality and the impressive contributions that women have made to our society.

Speaker, Ontarians should be proud of the strides we've made towards gender equality, but our work is far from done. We must continue to push for the full empowerment and participation of women in communities here and around the world. The full and equal participation of women in the political and economic landscape is a central pillar to democracy and justice. An event like The Dinner Party is a wonderful reminder of that.

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PRIVATE SAFETY TRAINING

Mr. Robert Bailey: I rise today to call for an immediate and full review of the unregulated practices of private safety training companies operating in the province of Ontario, specifically those conducting single-skill training courses such as firefighter ice rescue training.

On January 30, 2010, Point Edward, Ontario, volunteer firefighter Gary Kendall lost his life while participating in an organized ice rescue training exercise. On February 8, 2015, Adam Brunt of Bowmanville, Ontario, a firefighting student at Durham College, also perished while taking part in a similar ice rescue training exercise.

In the aftermath of the tragic accident at Point Edward, the Ministry of Labour prosecutor called for a coroner's inquest with recommendations so this sort of accident never happens again. No inquest was ever conducted.

Mr. Speaker, the loss of Mr. Kendall and Mr. Brunt are tragedies that cannot be undone. Action must be taken by this government and this minister now to ensure that no other family or community suffers the loss of a loved one in the same manner again.

I call on this government to immediately launch a formal inquiry into the practices of private companies providing emergency response training, and to develop formal guidelines for courses considered single-skill training that currently lie outside of provincial legislation.

BRAMPTON A'S

Ms. Harinder Malhi: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to speak about the Brampton A's. The Brampton A's are a Canadian professional basketball team that plays out of Brampton's Powerade Centre. In their inaugural season of 2013-14, head coach David Magley led the A's to an outstanding 27 and 13 record, finishing in second place in the league.

Last week, I, as well as a number of members of my community and my team, had the honour of attending a Brampton A's game against the Moncton Miracles. The Miracles definitely needed a miracle, as the A's set a franchise record of 130 points en route to a 31-point victory. The in-game fan experience provided was tremendous, and the talents of the players were evident by the on-court product.

Mr. Speaker, what's even more impressive is their efforts off the court. The Brampton A's players and their staff have become actively engaged in the community through school tours, camps, clinics, personal appearances, speaking engagements and serving food to those less fortunate. They are committed to becoming vital members of Brampton and the Peel regional community.

On Saturday, the A's will face off against the London Lightning in their first playoff game of the season at the Powerade Centre. They will also be honouring International Women's Day as a team, and have set up a reception prior to the game.

I encourage all my fellow residents of Peel and its surrounding communities, as well as my colleagues in the House, to attend and show support for the Brampton A's.

TRENTON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Mr. Speaker, let me dispel some of the rumours I am hearing about Trenton Memorial Hospital, in my riding of Northumberland—Quinte West.

The member from Prince Edward—Hastings threw out some numbers yesterday. Let me give you some actual facts about the staffing changes. TMH will be reduced by 20 registered nurses. Seven positions are already vacant, and eight are part-time.

Mr. Speaker, the member from Prince Edward—Hastings forgot to tell you about all the new staff that will be hired. Yes, TMH will be adding to its staff. It's going to be adding 25 registered practical nurses and personal support workers. That's 15 full-time and 10 part-time staff.

This new staff will provide more hours of patient care at the appropriate level needed for each individual patient. RNs will now be dedicated to work within their expanded training, RPNs will care for patients within their level of expertise and PSWs will provide patient care within their skill set. This means more staff and more hours of patient care.

The next step is under way. Mayor Jim Harrison and some councillors, along with community leaders John Smylie, Mike Cowan, Frank Barry and Betty Clost, are going to work together with Quinte Healthcare to develop a local, made-in-Quinte West health care plan for TMH and the community. I commend these people for their dedication and enthusiasm to create a positive plan to move forward in the city of Quinte West.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

SMART GROWTH FOR OUR COMMUNITIES ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 POUR UNE CROISSANCE INTELLIGENTE DE NOS COLLECTIVITÉS

Mr. McMeekin moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 73, An Act to amend the Development Charges Act, 1997 and the Planning Act / Projet de loi 73, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1997 sur les redevances d'aménagement et la Loi sur l'aménagement du territoire.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister for a short statement.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: If passed, the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act would give residents a greater, more meaningful say in how their communities grow and would provide more opportunities to fund growth-related infrastructure like transit and recycling through the development charges system.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Beaches—East York on a point of order.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure, if I may, to introduce my good friend Tom McGee, who is my CFO from my riding association and part of the team that helped get me here. Thank you, Tom. Welcome.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. It's not a point of order, but we do welcome our guests all the time.

It is now time for petitions.

PETITIONS

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mr. Ted Arnott: My petition is addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are progressive, degenerative diseases of the brain that cause thinking, memory and physical functioning to become seriously impaired;

"Whereas there is no known cause or cure for this devastating illness; and

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias also take their toll on hundreds of thousands of families and care partners; and

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias affect more than 200,000 Ontarians today, with an annual total economic burden rising to \$15.7 billion by 2020; and

"Whereas the cost related to the health care system is in the billions and only going to increase, at a time when our health care system is already facing enormous financial challenges; and

"Whereas there is work under way to address the need, but no coordinated or comprehensive approach to tackling the issues; and

"Whereas there is an urgent need to plan and raise awareness and understanding about Alzheimer's disease

and other dementias for the sake of improving the quality of life of the people it touches;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To approve the development of a comprehensive Ontario dementia plan that would include the development of strategies in primary health care, in health promotion and prevention of illness, in community development, in building community capacity and care partner engagement, in caregiver support and investments in research."

Of course, I support this petition as well.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I have a petition gathered by residents right across Essex county and the city of Windsor, and it reads as follows:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario keep the obstetrics unit open at Leamington District Memorial Hospital."

I fully agree with this petition. I will sign my name to it and give it to page Munder to take up to the desk.

ONTARIO DRUG BENEFIT PROGRAM

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Health Canada has approved the use of Soliris for patients with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome (aHUS), an ultra-rare, chronic and life-threatening genetic condition that progressively damages vital organs, leading to heart attack, stroke and kidney failure; and

"Whereas Soliris, the first and only pharmaceutical treatment in Canada for the treatment of aHUS, has allowed patients to discontinue plasma and dialysis therapies, and has been shown to improve kidney function and enable successful kidney transplant; and

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"Whereas the lack of public funding for Soliris is especially burdensome on the families of Ontario children and adults battling this catastrophic disease;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Instruct the Ontario government to immediately provide Soliris as a choice to patients with atypical hemolytic uremic syndrome and their health care providers in Ontario through public funding."

I agree with this petition and I leave it with Andrew. There are hundreds from across the province who would sign it.

YOUTH SERVICES

Mrs. Gila Martow: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas current provisions of the Child and Family Services Act prevent a children's aid society from

arranging temporary care for 16- and 17-year-olds who seek their assistance and have not been previously in care; and

"Whereas the inability to arrange care in a stable and nurturing family can expose youth to the risk of homelessness, criminality, poor education outcomes, and deteriorating physical and mental health; and

"Whereas at-risk 16- and 17-year-olds without care can impose a greater cost on social service providers than the cost of arranging for two years of temporary care; and

"Whereas the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies has repeatedly asked for 16- and 17-year-old youths to be able to seek CAS assistance regarding temporary care; and

"Whereas Bill 88 won all-party support during the 40th Parliament and was reported back to the House for third reading by the Standing Committee on Social Policy;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To pass Bill 54, the Right to Care Act, by giving it second and third reading on March 5"—which is today—"2015."

I sign my name and support this wholeheartedly and give it to page Arlyne.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. John Vanthof: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry is responsible for the governance and management of forestry;

"Whereas Resolute Forest Products holds 44% of the sustainable forest licence (SFL) in the Abitibi forest;

"Whereas Resolute Forest Products have announced their intent to give up their wood rights;

"Whereas the sustainable forest licence ... is a critical element in the marketability for economic development in the town of Iroquois Falls to potential business interests;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Appeal to the Ministry of Natural Resources to institute a moratorium on the transfer of the SFL for the wood rights being abandoned by Resolute Forest Products in the Abitibi River forest ... to ensure that new entrants into the marketplace are able to apply for the SFL."

I wholeheartedly agree, add my signature and give it to page Riley.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly with quite a number of signatures on it, and it's titled, "Fluoridate All Ontario Drinking Water." It reads as follows:

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

On behalf of all of my dentists in the Halton-Peel region, I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and to send it down with page Natalie.

WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE

Ms. Laurie Scott: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the present area maintenance contract system has failed Ontario drivers the past two winters;

"Whereas ensuring our roads are as safe as possible during the winter driving season is one of the fundamental responsibilities of the Ministry of Transportation;

"Whereas the unsafe conditions in the winter of 2013-14 led to a special investigation by the Auditor General of Ontario;

"Whereas the managed outsourcing system for winter roads maintenance, where the private contractor is responsible for maintenance, but MTO patrols the region and directs the contractor on the deployment of vehicles, sand and salt, and has a proven track record for removing snow and ensuring that Ontario's highways are safe for travellers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Ministry of Transportation take immediate action to improve the maintenance of winter roads based on the positive benefits of the previous delivery model, where MTO plays more of a role in directing the private contractor."

This was brought to me by the Minden Times's Chad Ingram, with many signatures from my riding.

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. John Vanthof: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Resolute Forest Products has closed their mill in Iroquois Falls, Ontario;

“Whereas Resolute Forest Products has indicated it’s intent on demolishing the mill and restoring the site to a green space;

“Whereas residents of the town of Iroquois Falls want assurance that the Ministry of the Environment will ensure that all environmental standards met and maintained in the decommissioning of the site;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of the Environment closely monitors the decommissioning of the Resolute site in Iroquois Falls to ensure that the area is ecologically sound for future use.”

I wholeheartedly agree, attach my signature and send it with page Rachel.

CREDIT UNIONS

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition here that’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario support our 1.3 million members across Ontario through loans to small businesses to start up, grow and create jobs, help families to buy homes and assist their communities with charitable investments and volunteering; and

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario want a level playing field so they can provide the same service to our members as other financial institutions and promote economic growth without relying on taxpayers’ resources;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Support the strength and growth of credit unions to support the strength and growth of Ontario’s economy and create jobs in three ways:

“—maintain current credit union provincial tax rates;

“—show confidence in Ontario credit unions by increasing credit union-funded deposit insurance limits to a minimum of \$250,000;

“—allow credit unions to diversify by allowing Ontario credit unions to own 100% of subsidiaries.”

I agree with this, affix my signature and give it to page Eileen.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: In support of the member from Mississauga–Streetsville, I want to do the petition to fluoridate all Ontario drinking water.

“Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

“Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means

of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

“Whereas dental decay is the second most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

“Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

“Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario.”

On behalf of the people of Mississauga–Streetsville, I present this petition to the Legislature and hand it to page Andrew.

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LEGAL AID

Ms. Daiene Vernile: “Population-based legal services funding.

“Whereas Mississauga Community Legal Services provides free legal services to legal aid clients within a community of nearly 800,000 population; and

“Whereas legal services in communities like Toronto and Hamilton serve, per capita, fewer people living in poverty, are better staffed and better funded; and

“Whereas Mississauga and Brampton have made progress in having Ontario provide funding for human services on a fair and equitable, population-based model;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of the Attorney General revise the current distribution of allocated funds ... and adopt a population-based model, factoring in population growth rates to ensure Ontario funds are allocated in an efficient, fair and effective manner.”

I shall add my name to this and give this to page Inaya.

TAXATION

Ms. Laurie Scott: “Stop the Carbon Tax” petition:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Liberal government has indicated they plan on introducing a new carbon tax in 2015; and

“Whereas Ontario taxpayers have already been burdened with a health tax of \$300 to \$900 per person that

doesn't necessarily go into health care, a \$2-billion smart meter program that failed to conserve energy, and households are paying almost \$700 more annually for unaffordable subsidies under the Green Energy Act; and

"Whereas a carbon tax scheme would increase the cost of everyday goods including gasoline and home heating; and

"Whereas the government continues to run unaffordable deficits without a plan to reduce spending while collecting \$30 billion more annually in tax revenues than 11 years ago; and

"Whereas the aforementioned points lead to the conclusion that the government is seeking justification to raise taxes to pay for their excessive spending, without accomplishing any concrete targets;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To abandon the idea of introducing yet another unaffordable and ineffective tax on Ontario families and businesses."

This is signed by many, many people from all over my riding. I'll hand it to page Arlyne.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario is home to over 400,000 first-, second- and third-generation Hispanic Canadians who originate from the 23 Hispanic countries around the world; and who have made significant contributions to the growth and vibrancy of the province of Ontario;

"Whereas October is a month of great significance for the Hispanic community worldwide; and allows an opportunity to remember, celebrate and educate future generations about the outstanding achievements of Hispanic peoples to our province's social, economic and multicultural fabric;

"We, the undersigned, call upon members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to support proclaiming October of each year as Hispanic Heritage Month and support Bill 28 by MPP Cristina Martins from the riding of Davenport."

I agree and support this petition, will sign it and hand it over to page Morgan.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

REGISTERED RETIREMENT SAVINGS PROTECTION ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION DES RÉGIMES ENREGISTRÉS D'ÉPARGNE EN VUE DE LA RETRAITE

Mr. Rinaldi moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 70, An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings / Projet de loi 70, Loi visant à protéger les régimes enregistrés d'épargne en vue de la retraite.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It gives me real pleasure to stand in the House today to talk about this piece of legislation. Frankly, it's my first private member's bill since being back here on June 12. It's always good to bring forward pieces of legislation that help our communities. In my particular case, it will really help all Ontarians.

First, let me recognize the hard work of my staff to help me put this together, especially Travis Hoover, who has worked very closely to make sure it got to this point, Speaker.

Secondly, I'd be remiss not to acknowledge that a similar piece of legislation was previously introduced by my good friend the former member for Sudbury, Rick Bartolucci. Of course, Minister Jeff Leal, who is here with us in this session, introduced it two other times. It's always good, because it raises awareness of some of the issues that we face that, frankly, as Ontarians, sometimes we don't get to find out about until we encounter such challenges.

Speaker, Bill 70 is entitled An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings. As you may be aware, the purpose of this bill is to protect registered retirement savings plans and registered retirement income funds, as well as deferred profit-sharing plans, from most creditors. Those plans, however—and I stress—will be subject to support orders enforced under the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act, 1996, and orders respecting the separation of property in family matters.

In case there are some challenges within a family, this bill will not impact the division of property. In this case, saving plans are to be equally distributed amongst husband and wife or extended family members.

As I previously mentioned, similar versions of this bill were introduced, asking the Ontario Legislature to protect from creditors what retirement savings the people of Ontario manage to accumulate in various forms of registered retirement savings plans. Similar legislation to this has already occurred in other provinces such as Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, Quebec, Manitoba and Alberta. The majority of the other provinces across this great nation of ours have already adopted similar legislation. By doing this in Ontario, it creates a more seamless approach when we're faced with these challenges, frankly, to our ratepayers.

I mentioned before, and again I acknowledge my good friends Rick Bartolucci and Minister Leal for having some insight into this, who were able to bring this to this great place to debate in the past.

All governments of whatever political stripe and whatever level in Canada always encourage regular participation in retirement savings plans. As we get accus-

tomed—we never have enough. When we retire, the Canada Pension Plan that we have, although it's probably one of the best in the world from a structural standpoint, frankly, Speaker, at my age and at my wife's age—if I had to depend on that, I would have a tough time. I think we all would.

Just in recent months, we here in Ontario have been working on an Ontario pension plan due to lack of support from our federal counterparts to enhance the Canada Pension Plan. I think—I shouldn't say "I think"—I know that for my kids and grandkids, that will be a huge boost.

But on the other hand, people should have the ability, if possible, to facilitate and provide some extended investments, to help along as they reach retirement age. That's why this piece of legislation will be very, very helpful.

In Ontario today, the vast majority of working people are self-employed or employed by small businesses. In fact, there are more than 340,000 small and medium-sized enterprises across Ontario, which make up more than 99% of the province's businesses and account for more than 50% of all jobs. Many of these folks are not in a position to receive self-directed retirement vehicles to augment their pension plans as offered through public or some private sector employment. As such, a considerable number of citizens must rely upon their personal investments, such as RRSPs, to sustain themselves through their retirement years.

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While all governments in Canada rightfully encourage these sorts of investments, current law in Ontario does not exempt DPSPs, RRIFs or RSPs from credit seizure. As such, the law in regard to credit seizure is inconsistent and therefore unfair in its treatment of registered retirement plan holders.

As previously stated, other provinces in Canada have already passed similar legislation in this regard. In November 2007, just as an example, the government of Manitoba, under the stewardship of Premier Greg Selinger, the then finance minister, passed into law the Registered Retirement Savings Protection Act. As Premier Selinger noted, "The Registered Retirement Savings Protection Act is designed to protect from creditors retirement savings held in deferred profit-sharing plans, registered retirement savings plans and registered retirement income funds.... We want Manitobans to have retirement savings available in their senior years and so we have moved to protect these funds."

Likewise, in 2005 the government of Canada, through amendments to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act under Bill C-55, initiated similar legislation. The act, subject to certain conditions, exempts registered plans from being vested in a trustee as property available to satisfy the claims of a bankrupt creditor. This bill received royal assent and has been proclaimed into law.

Speaker, I can certainly understand why skeptics may be concerned that this legislation could possibly be used as a safe haven for debtors who wish to avoid or defraud their related creditors. However, this is certainly not the

intent. As stated in the preamble, the legislation explicitly exempts orders made under the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act, meaning that parents who are defaulting on child support can still be pursued, as can separated spouses.

Also, with retirement pension plans, the credit protection provided in the new law will not apply to the enforcement of maintenance orders or orders from a division of family property. Similarly, the federal act protects against debt abuse by capping the amount of the exemption by making contributions within 12 months of a bankruptcy available to creditors by requiring that the exempted amount be locked in until rolled over into a retirement income fund annuity or similar product.

In this economic climate of uncertainty and the fluctuation of world markets, I believe that the spirit of this bill is not only fair but timely.

In the last couple of minutes, I would just highlight that for the majority of my working lifespan, I've been self-employed. In the early days of self-employment, sometimes we had to make a decision about whether my wife could go shopping or if we'd pay the bills or the odd staff that we had. Speaker, I think this is not uncommon for a lot of small start-up business folks. So it took us a while to put some money aside and to turn it into some type of a savings plan like RRSPs. When the time comes that I will have to depend on those, if there's anything that will get in the way, through maybe no fault of my own—some folks sometimes come across unfortunate circumstances. Through no fault of their own, they become somewhat financially challenged. One of the only things they might have that they worked very hard—and I know how hard sometimes it was to put that \$50 a month in a separate account so that we could turn it into an RRSP towards the end of the year—how difficult it is.

Having experienced the challenge to put those couple of dollars aside each month—and I know that there are a lot of other Lous out there who probably went through the same experience. We work very hard, and that's what makes Ontarians, Canadians, who we are.

This piece of legislation, if passed, would at least give me that little bit of extra protection for those few dollars—not a lot—that my wife and I were able to scrape together over the months and years of our working life while we were looking after our kids.

Speaker, I would encourage all members of this House to support Bill 70. Once again, it's one of those tools that will help us for the future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm glad to be able to rise today to comment on Bill 70, the Registered Retirement Savings Protection Act.

First of all, I would like to go over the bill summary: "The purpose of the bill is to protect registered retirement savings plans and registered retirement income funds, as well as deferred profit-sharing plans, from most creditors. Those plans are, however, still subject to support orders

enforced under the Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act, 1996, and orders respecting the separation of property in family matters.”

First of all, I'd like to say that we're supporting the bill because I believe it is important that we do everything we can to ensure that Ontarians who work hard and play by the rules or the law have the ability to reap the fruits of their labour in retirement. It's the right thing to do, and it's only fair.

Speaker, I want to say that I tried to put money into my RRSP every year, and I'm proud to say that, for the most part, I was able to do that for most of my 33 years at Bell Canada. It wasn't always easy. It came at a difficult time of year, as it meant sometimes cutting back on other priorities that we had. Certainly, it meant that our March break trips most years were very modest: sometimes a day trip to the ski hill or the Kanata wave pool. It sometimes meant that I drove a car much longer than I would have wanted to, especially considering that in a rural area, family cars are essential to get to work and all the trips that must be made in an area without public transit. On a positive note, I was able to take advantage of Ford Canada's replacement plan when they gave me \$2,000 for a 10-year-old vehicle—so certainly there are some benefits to driving old vehicles, but certainly not where I wanted to be.

Because of my RRSP, I was able to leverage savings through the home ownership plan when we built our house in 2002.

Registered plans are important for many things, but retirement is certainly the key.

I brought my experiences up because I believe that this bill must recognize that while most people work hard and play by the rules, it isn't always the practice, and we can see that on a regular basis on the other side of the House.

Is it the purpose to protect funds that may have been received through fraudulent means? For instance, there are many plans in the marketplace where one can borrow the money for an RRSP. We would want to ensure that one would not believe that it's the intention that one would simply borrow the money, put it in an RRSP to have it protected, and then default on the loan. Since you can top up an RRSP for many years, this can add up to a substantial amount of money, sometimes a couple of hundred thousand dollars if you go back a few years—just to make sure that doesn't happen.

In that line, if savings are generated from the proceeds of a crime—I think that was talked about, as well—it would not be the intention of the member opposite to have those savings protected either. I'm sure that we could make these amendments at committee, and we look forward to that—as there are probably those amendments and some others that would need to be ensured, through consultation, that they're looked after.

Again, we support the bill. We think it's important that Ontarians save for their retirement. We want to make sure that we encourage them to save whenever they can and as much as possible. This is just another part of that.

It shows people that if they work hard and put their money away, they can expect to have the money there when they need it throughout retirement.

I will be supporting this bill, and I want to thank the Speaker for the opportunity to speak to it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

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Mr. Paul Miller: This bill was first introduced as a private member's bill by the current Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs in 2008. I remember it well. I was a member of the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills that reviewed and amended the bill in 2010. Unfortunately, as too often happens in this place, good private members' bills never make it to third reading because they don't have the stamp of the government on the front.

The now minister brought the bill back in 2012, but again, it went nowhere. I am pleased to see that the member for Northumberland—Quinte West has seen fit to bring this bill back to the House in the hope of a better outcome this time. Third time's a charm, they say.

We are all aware of the importance of pensions and how essential it is to encourage young and middle-aged people to save for their retirement. Unfortunately, that's not happening. Most Ontarians—most Canadians—are not saving for retirement. If you can't find a good, full-time, permanent job, it's not easy to put money away to save for your retirement, and when wages are stagnant and hydro bills keep climbing, it's not an easy thing to ask Ontarians to put money away.

That's why we have a public pension system to support our seniors in retirement. It's why New Democrats continue to advocate for expanding public pension provisions, and it's why all of us across party lines support incentives to encourage people to save for their own retirement as well. But it's hard. Too many Ontarians don't have access to registered workplace pension plans. This is especially true for those who work in small and medium-sized businesses. Those who can afford to save often choose to do so through RRSPs, registered retirement savings plans.

However, other forms of retirement savings such as workplace pension plans, RRSPs and related retirement savings vehicles are vulnerable to credit seizure. The law in Ontario in regard to credit seizure is inconsistent and is unfair in its treatment of registered retirement holders. This loophole must be closed, and this bill seeks to do just that. The government of Canada in 2005, and other provinces, including Manitoba in 2007, have closed the loophole within their own jurisdictions. It is well past the time that this Legislature does the same.

This act, subject to certain conditions and exemptions, exempts registered plans from being vested in a trustee as property available to satisfy the claims of bankrupt creditors. It closes the loophole for RRSPs, registered retirement income funds and deferred profit-sharing plans.

The plans will still be subject to support orders arising from family law. That will not change, nor should we

allow people to escape their family responsibilities. But other creditors should not be permitted to go after someone's retirement savings either.

The current loophole is especially unfair to small business owners. It punishes them for their entrepreneurship, and it most likely acts as a strong deterrent to many budding business builders.

We should also recognize that many workers and pensioners enrolled in a workplace pension plan are at risk. They are at risk because of pension underfunding by their employers and because of the priority given to other creditors in bankruptcy processes.

Let's talk for a minute or two about Stelco pensioners. I can talk about that and the pension guarantee fund.

Many years ago I was in Ottawa, lobbying to protect pensions and severances, and not a lot has happened. The Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act in Canada is a joke. It doesn't protect. It gives banks, insurance companies and creditors first dibs on any of the assets of any company that goes under, and the workers who have maybe put 30 or 40 years of their lives into building that business and helping contribute to the wealth of that owner and his partners are left at the railway stop. They lose their benefits. They most likely lose their severance unless they can get it in court, and that takes years. Their pensions are either destroyed or brutally deducted to a point where they end up on ODSP or OW.

The law is federal, and the provincial government has to step up with the feds to fix this problem. I have many people coming into my office on a regular basis in tears because they had negotiated deferred wages over 35 years in contracts with companies, and they were looking forward to their sunshine years with a decent income. But it's not there. It's gone. Now these people are working in stores, in Kmart, at 70 and 75 years old, because they can't pay their bills because the company either abandoned, went under or was bought by a foreign entity.

It's a disgrace what's going on with our seniors in this country. It's a disgrace what is going on with the working people in our country. We have to stand up as legislators, as this member is trying to do in a small way. We've got a long way to go. I've been fighting for this for 15 years, federally and provincially, and I've met with resistance from the present Conservative government in Ottawa, and not a lot got done here.

Let's talk about the pension guarantee fund. I've had two bills in this Legislature to bring that up to a level that's acceptable, to \$2,500 a month. Their own guy, Harry Arthurs, who they appointed to do pension studies across this province, who I travelled with and talked to and sat down with—he picked my brain for some of the things that I thought about what you should do with unions and pension plans. We came to an agreement. He agreed with me. He recommended to this government to raise it to \$2,500. It never happened, Speaker. They didn't raise it \$25. It's still at \$1,000. Some people's pensions vary from \$3,000 to \$4,000 on a defined pension plan. All they're guaranteed is \$1,000.

So you lose 75% of your pension, and they say, "Oh, well. There's nothing we can do about it; it's the law of

the land, federally and provincially. We can't help you. I'm sorry"—absolutely unacceptable. Speaker, it's fraudulent, it's inhumane and morally wrong.

Until this government and the government in Ottawa smarten up and stick up for our seniors—and we are all getting there, folks. Do you know that your pension plan—even in the public sector—can be vulnerable?

We might want to take a lesson from the best pension plan in Ontario and in Canada, called HOOPP. It's the Ontario hospital workers' pension plan. It's 120% funded. Their actuaries and their accountants are the best in the world. Why can't we copy them? Why can't we do that for all the other people? No. We're going to go to a defined contribution plan. What if you're not working? What if you're laid off? What if you can't contribute to that plan? Where are you going to be in 40 years? You're going to be lucky if you get one tenth of it. We've got to take a good, hard look at this, and this is just the start of many things that happen.

I'm sorry, to the member, that it's in the form of a private member's bill, because he and I know how far they go most times. They don't get on the order paper. It does not become law. It does not get that stamp 99% of the time. This should be a government bill, not a private member's bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you to the member for Northumberland—Quinte West, my seatmate, for bringing this excellent bill forward.

I would like to also acknowledge Mr. Bartolucci, who brought the bill forward once before, and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs—as PA, I'm delighted that the member from Peterborough brought this bill forward two other times before. So, really, third time lucky didn't work. I would like to correct the member for Hamilton East: Three times wasn't lucky. We do certainly hope that this is fourth time lucky.

The importance of private members' bills and why my seatmate here would have brought this particular bill forward at this time is because it shows his community, as other private members' bills do, the things that are important to him: raising people up, helping people—helping people who have limited retirement savings. That's why this is not a government bill at this point. It is a bill from our excellent member from Northumberland—Quinte West.

I would like to really start my remarks off by recognizing a great Canadian, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, who stated in his last speech to Canadians in 1968, in April—and I remember Mr. Pearson. He was a good friend of the family. I have a wonderful picture of my father and Mr. Pearson and I all shaking hands in 1967. He was an incredible Canadian. But he noted at that time that "A wise man once observed that failures are made only by those who fail to dare, not by those who dare to fail."

Why I think that's such an appropriate quote to this issue and this bill—and we've heard reference to it

already from members of both sides of the House—is that RRSP protection is something that is a benefit that will accrue to entrepreneurial people—people who are creating businesses, who are creating jobs.

I personally believe the engine of job creation in our province will stem from small business people who take risks, who take chances, who hire people, who employ people to manufacture widgets, to provide a service, to do things. In the course of them starting a business and taking risks, they still have to—as the CEO or president of that corporation they have to try to look after their retirement. If they're able to put bits and pieces of their annual income into an RRSP, looking forward to having some kind of support in the future, then they do so. Sometimes it's tough—really, really tough as an entrepreneur—to take that additional cash out of the business as your dividend or your salary when the business may need additional money.

We all know maybe one in 10 businesses, as they start, are successful. It's very hard, and it's very risky to initiate. But when an individual starts a business and can start to employ people, that's an extraordinarily important thing.

1400

Anecdotally, I too have been an entrepreneur most of my life. I have been out seeking new business opportunities and starting new businesses. One in 10 businesses succeeds. My theory has always been to try to start a new business every month, and then maybe by the end of the year you'll have a successful one. You have to be prepared, in risk-taking, such that you will find ways of making a living for yourself and supporting your family, but, so importantly, that if you are putting money away in your RRSPs, they can be protected.

If I can, for a moment, I'd like to just talk about my partner, Lisa Martin. Lisa, 25 years ago, with her sister, started up a business in hearing health care. There they were, the two of them, starting a small business in Beaches–East York, in fact, attached to the Toronto East General Hospital—a small business helping the community with hearing health, providing better lives for people who were losing their hearing by providing service.

In the course of the last 25 years, she has been able to build that business up to nine or 10 locations across southwestern and central Ontario. She has created an income for herself, for her family, her sister, and now they employ in excess of 70 people. That is the spirit of entrepreneurialism.

I know that as she was facing difficult times in her business, she still would put money aside into her RRSP in order to protect herself in the future. However, we all know that even when you're appearing to be so successful, extraordinary events can happen. She could quite easily, in an industry that is changing so quickly—in the blink of an eye, the technology could be disrupted, and everything she has worked for could get wiped out.

As entrepreneurs, we know that when we borrow money, we are often required to put our personal guarantees on the line. In the business failure situation, the

result is that we go into bankruptcy. If someone was in bankruptcy and we could not protect their RRSP, that would be a severe impediment, a disincentive to starting businesses. I think we need to fix this loophole. Again, I thank the member for bringing this forward.

Interestingly enough, RRSPs were first introduced in Canada, federally, in 1957. I think that's a significant year, because that's the year I was born. I'm delighted to know that RRSPs have been around just as long as I have.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: So 1957?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Yes, 1957. And I would add, Mr. Speaker, I was 57 last year, and born in 1957, and, as luck would have it, I think I was the 57th member called for the government as part of this election. I mean, 57 is an extraordinarily lucky number for me, and I appreciate that. So we want to protect the RRSPs that were first started in 1957.

Registered retirement income funds were started in the late 1970s as a new vehicle for investing in your retirement, helping seniors withdraw money in income funds. We want to protect those as well with this credit bill. You know that you have my support, to my seatmate from Northumberland–Quinte West.

I'm also delighted to hear that we are seeing support from the other side of the House. This is really encouraging. I know this is an important bill to people on both sides of the political spectrum, the right-wingers and the left-wingers. This is important, because it helps all Ontarians, and we need to bring it forward.

We're not, of course, acting alone, as the member mentioned. Most other provinces—Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, British Columbia, Quebec, Manitoba and Alberta—have this protection, so we need to be catching up in order to make this happen. That's what we're proposing to do, and we appreciate your support for going forward in that direction.

What this also does is provide a level playing field for entrepreneurs, compared to people who are employed in businesses that have corporate pension plans. Those, to my understanding, are protected from creditors, and it's important that we should level that playing field so people will take the risks and create jobs.

I think I'm sharing my time with the member from Trinity–Spadina, who doesn't seem to be in the House at the moment, but he'll be back.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm happy to stand and speak on Bill 70, which is being presented, I believe, for the fourth time—the number keeps rising for this topic—by the member from Northumberland–Quinte West.

I think it's noble to protect people's retirement savings in their RRSPs, and I can certainly see the logic, somewhat, of protecting them from creditors. I do support that. But then we have to also be cognizant of who the creditors are. They could be small business people who are also trying to save for their retirement.

As the member from Beaches–East York mentioned, one in 10 businesses succeeds. It's possible that the one

in 10 that succeeds is because they are owed money, possibly from a customer. If they're not able to collect, if they sue that customer and haven't received payment, if the only money available is in RRSPs, all of a sudden we have a situation where—I don't know if we're robbing Peter to pay Paul, but we have somebody whose retirement is protected at the expense of somebody else. I think that's something that we all have to be aware of in terms of plans for an Ontario pension plan by this government: that it shouldn't be that one person's retirement income is at the detriment of another person in Ontario. I think that's kind of what's missing from a lot of the debate here.

I want to speak a little bit about some of the professionals in our province, particularly physicians who are specialists who often don't hit the marketplace until they're well into their 30s, after undergraduate degrees, residencies, fellowships and all the training that our specialists go through. They're not starting to put into their RRSPs until they're, obviously, working, and then they are forced to withdraw at the age of 69, just like the general population, yet we're encouraging them to stay in the workforce past the retirement age of 65. Oftentimes, we see specialists and doctors working well into their 70s and 80s. They're at a bit of a disadvantage, because they're told, "Save for your retirement. Put it in a retirement savings plan. You will be putting money away and not having the tax at the higher rate when you're young and working full-time. You'll be taxed at a lower rate at the age of 69." We all know that these specialists, if they're still working, are still in a high tax bracket, so really, the only benefit they're getting, Mr. Speaker, is that they're deferring the taxes. It's not as great a benefit as the general population. I think that we should take into account the many years of study—11 and 12 years are average for many specialists' post-secondary education. If they're not hitting the workforce for maybe 10 years after the average person in Ontario, then maybe they shouldn't have to withdraw from their RRSPs for an additional 10 years as well.

I think that we have to look at the implications of the different specialists we need in the province. We have to look at the implications for small business people. We shouldn't be protecting one small business person's retirement at the detriment of somebody else's retirement. Obviously, we support protecting people's RRSPs, but I think that we have to look at it carefully. As the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek mentioned, what if the money was from criminal activity?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Niagara Falls.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak on the bill today.

The registered retirement savings act, if passed, will bring Ontario into line with a number of other provinces and countries that have moved to protect retirement savings.

As the debate over the proposed Ontario pension plan continues on, this is absolutely clear: Ontarians are not saving enough. We know that 50% of the people in the

province are either self-employed or working in a small business. A lot of these businesses are not in a position where they can offer a company pension plan.

As head of my local union, Unifor Local 199, I represented both types of workplaces: those with pension plans and those without. I've seen first-hand how people try to overcome their retirement worries. When workers can afford to, they turn to savings plans. Workers in the province of Ontario and right across the country should always be at the head of the line, not at the back of the line, and certainly creditors shouldn't be ahead of workers, when it comes to pensions.

I never represented any workplace that participated in profit-sharing.

There's another reason that retirement savings are often low or don't exist at all. As I mentioned in the House last week, we know that just over 70% of people living in this province don't have retirement savings. This is a major problem for a lot of people in Ontario. It has nothing to do with people not wanting to save. It's because people in this province are struggling to make ends meet and are stuck in situations where they work hard, full-time hours, and can't get ahead. People are having trouble putting away for their retirement. It's the number one reason that this House needs to work harder to get people back to work.

1410

But working without a pension plan and struggling to make ends meet creates the same outcome: Most people are not saving properly for their retirement. So, to encourage people to save for their retirement, governments will offer all kinds of incentives. The one we're discussing here today is the registered retirement savings plan, better known as RRSPs.

We know today that there are loopholes that exist that make RRSPs vulnerable to credit seizures. We also know that many places in Canada and the United States federal government have moved to close these loopholes. I'll give you an example of what transpired right in my riding just before I got elected here. A place called Vertis employed over 100 people. The plant closed. They threw the people out of work. What they did is, they started their company right back up in the United States—never shut down, never lost one day of shipping that product back into the province of Ontario. Think about that. As people in my riding lost their jobs, they didn't know what to do. What did the company do? It went to America and shipped it right back to Ontario. We did nothing about it. You know what's worse? Today, as I stand up in this House, those same 100 workers, those same families, those same communities haven't received one penny of their severance. We have to make sure that we correct that in the province of Ontario. It should never have happened in this province.

It's not hard to see why there might be an issue with the existence of these loopholes. People would work hard for their whole lives for a business they started and they ran themselves, a business that does not offer a pension plan. They're responsible people. They're thinking ahead, and they want to make sure that when they retire,

they don't live in poverty, something that we're seeing here. Each month, they put a little money away in their RRSP.

But a problem can present itself here. We saw that during the financial crisis a number of people and businesses went bankrupt because of the downturn in the global economy. The economy was doing badly, people weren't able to spend and it was our businesses and our small business owners who suffered. I have a lot more to say here but, unfortunately, I'm going to run out of time.

But I am going to say to the member who put this bill forward, if your government cares about what we're talking about and protecting pensions in this province, you have a majority government. You don't have to do it under a private member's bill; you can do it by a majority government. Let's get it done. Let's make sure our seniors do not live in poverty and that their pensions are protected.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Han Dong: It gives me pleasure to debate this bill, Bill 70, An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings, presented by the honourable member from Northumberland-Quinte West. It's a very important topic.

First of all, I've always thought it's wrong to allow creditors to reach in and take one's registered savings, because the registered savings were put aside before personal income tax kicks in. Those are tax shelters for those who want to save for their retirement. In other words, if there's \$10,000 in value, there is a part, in withdrawing, that has to be contributed to the government. It doesn't make a lot of sense for creditors to take \$10,000 in full value and claim those are theirs. On that front, I think this bill would do justice to block creditors from seizure of those registered savings, because I don't think the creditors are fully entitled to it.

The second thing I want to mention is, when we talk about registered retirement savings, automatically we think about CPP, we think about the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan that we've talked about very much in the last little while in this House. In essence, we all realize that Ontarians are not saving enough.

We know that this past Sunday was the deadline for RRSP contributions. According to my quick Google search, 57% of Ontarians contributed this year to their RRSPs, compared to 65% in 2014 and 62% in 2013. So we know there is a huge chunk, a greater portion of our population, not putting money aside. Whether they cannot afford it, whether they choose not to do so or they have other retirement savings plans, I don't know. But the fact of the matter is that we have to cultivate and encourage a habit of saving and planning ahead.

Thinking about myself, when I was 25, when I first walked to my job, after I got the offer the manager said to me, "Look, we have a pretty good benefits package."

I said, "I'm 25. I'm really not thinking about that. I just want to get onto a good project and really perform and learn what I need to learn."

At the time, he was just over 30. He said, "When you get to my age, you will start thinking about it."

Now I'm 37. I am thinking about it because I'm worried about the future—my own future, my family's future.

I think it's very important to encourage young professionals to start looking at how they should put aside money, and this bill will do that. You can't encourage one to put aside money after knowing that there is a risk that if something happened down the road, someone could come in and claim your savings. That is very wrong.

The other thing I thought about was my parents. They're both retired on a fixed income right now, and they are heavily depending on their pension. They are also paying a mortgage. There are many seniors like that, especially in the newcomer community in my riding. If they have to constantly look back and think about what happens one day, when someone can come in and not only take their house away, but also take the future of their retirement away, it is everything against why they chose to come to this country and what they've contributed in their life.

I think this bill is just on that front; it protects seniors and encourages youth to start saving. I'm happy to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to have a few moments today to contribute to the discussion.

I note that this is, I believe, the fourth time we've visited this topic. While I always believe in the importance and the value of discussion and would never want to make any comments to the opposite, at the same time, having relatively the same bill show up four times suggests to me that there should come a time soon when decisions are made.

But I also realize that this bill and the problem it represents is that perennial one of creating balance, of making sure that people are protected under more than one circumstance. You want to be able to put money safely aside, but then you also have the opportunity to move it out.

It's already been mentioned about—you know, is this a sophisticated form of money laundering? How do you know how the money got in there? There are so many angles to this bill that I think it should move on and have the scrutiny of people who can really crystallize the essence of the balance that I suggest is necessary. It serves a great purpose as a private member's bill: to stimulate our conversation on our debt.

I have to join with other speakers this afternoon in looking back at so many issues that are tied to pension issues such as this one. You look at the work that was done for the Arthurs report and the kind of investigation and broad perspective that it took. Don Drummond also sounded an alarm bell for us, particularly for the members opposite, on unfunded liabilities and issues like that. I guess one of my favourite concerns is the Pension Benefits Guarantee Fund.

1420

Again, so many of these pieces of legislation and the principles that stand behind them are really out of date now. We've moved on. Electronic banking, different kinds of things people can do with money and saving it—there's a whole suite of things like TFSAs and things like that. I'm afraid that our legal framework that those operate in is not up to date. I think this particular piece of legislation—and the problem that it exposes—is similar in that it needs to be moved along into the 21st century.

Also, in my last few moments, I want to put in a plug for Bill 57, the Pooled Registered Pension Plans Act, because it would solve many of the kinds of issues that people have raised about the challenges of saving money, the complexities, and the cost of administration. Those are all issues that are covered in the essence of Bill 57.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Northumberland—Quinte West, you have two minutes.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: I just want to say thank you to all the members who had an opportunity to speak about Bill 70.

I'm delighted to hear that pretty well every member who has spoken has shown interest in moving this forward. I also understand that maybe there need to be some adjustments. With every piece of legislation, nobody ever gets it right the first time, I don't think, but we certainly try. So I look forward to going to committee and having more debate. To try to get those fine points ironed out, I guess, is my goal.

I also want to say that on Thursday afternoons—and I do not have the pleasure of being here all Thursday afternoons, when we're talking about private members' bills—it's nice to see some of those political walls being removed. I just want to thank the members for their comments, although there were some pointed at our government—and that's fair; I think it's fair game—but to have that type of sincerity when we're talking about issues that make Ontarians lives a little bit easier, a little bit more adaptable.

I'm certainly looking forward, with the help of all members—not only those who are here today, but beyond that as well—to getting this moved on to the next step. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will take the vote on this item at the end of regular business.

SAFE ROUNDABOUTS ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES CARREFOURS GIRATOIRES

Mr. Harris moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 65, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to provide rules for the use of roundabouts / *Projet de loi 65, Loi modifiant le Code de la route pour prévoir des règles régissant l'utilisation des carrefours giratoires.*

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Michael Harris: I stand today, two years after first introducing a private member's bill to have roundabout rules written into the Highway Traffic Act, to finally debate the need for those rules and the need for consistency, as called for in the Safe Roundabouts Act, 2015.

Over those two years, I've made numerous attempts to bring to this government's attention the fact that, with more than 40 roundabouts across Waterloo region in my area, and more being constructed in communities across the province, it's our responsibility as legislators to move forward on enhancing roundabout safety here in the province of Ontario.

To date, that call has not been heeded. I hope that, together, we can change that situation today.

Before I get rolling too far here, let me say off the top that I am a big fan of roundabouts. Again, with over 40 in my area, I have come to understand the many well-established operational benefits they can provide to traffic flow, speed and severity of collisions. That said, I have also come to understand that while roundabouts have their advantages, whether it's in my region of Waterloo, in Hamilton, Ottawa or Windsor, concerns over consistency of rules for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists continue to grow as roundabout construction increases.

Quite simply, as the Highway Traffic Act currently fails to address roundabouts whatsoever, my bill seeks to remedy that omission by (1) defining roundabouts, and (2) giving the Minister of Transportation the ability to establish clear, uniform rules throughout Ontario.

Specifically, if MPPs in this House join me in this effort, the Safe Roundabouts Act will update the Highway Traffic Act to include a definition of a roundabout as "an intersection with one-way circulation counter-clockwise around a central island where entering traffic must yield the right of way to the traffic circulating within the intersection."

Further, the act would require the minister to consult. The minister must conduct a study and consult with the public about the safe use of roundabouts.

He will have to report. The minister is required to table a progress report every year until a regulation to address the safety of roundabouts is made.

Third and finally, act: Following consultation, the minister is to make regulations establishing rules of the road that apply to roundabouts.

This consultation requirement would address a series of factors including the use of crosswalks, signs and markings, lighting, commercial vehicles, speed limits, signalling, entering and exiting roundabouts, uniformity of road design standards including consistency in lane width and, of course, compliance with accessibility standards.

This will not only raise awareness of how to manoeuvre through a roundabout, but increase pedestrian, cyclist and motorist safety, helping to reduce accidents across Ontario.

As I noted off the top, it has been two years since I first introduced this legislation to enhance safety at roundabouts across the province. In fact, it has actually been three years since I first got to work on the concern. It was actually one of the first issues I faced as a new MPP.

It was an early morning just days before my being first elected in 2011 that a 16-year-old St. Mary's High School student in Kitchener, crossing the southbound lanes near the Homer Watson/Block Line Road roundabout, was struck by a city bus exiting the roundabout, causing serious injuries. When I looked into the matter, I was shocked to find out that not only are roundabout rules not included in the Highway Traffic Act; they're not even defined. It's as if, legislatively, roundabouts don't even exist.

Since that day, I have used every tool at my disposal—petitions, letters, media conferences, meetings and, yes, private member's bills—to get this government's attention and have this clear safety concern addressed in the Highway Traffic Act. To bolster my work and to follow up on a major effort, the region of Waterloo has already undertaken to educate all members of the public on roundabouts. I also called on government to require new drivers to undertake a roundabout road test for their G and G2 licences, to prove they are able to properly navigate traffic circles in the province.

Time and again I have been met with ministerial rejection, refusal at times and ridicule, despite the obvious need for action. It's a bit of a head-scratcher, as this is a clear issue of safety. There's no partisan politics here, and there's a relatively easy fix. Yet, it's a fix that for some reason this government has so far refused to endorse.

First it was Minister Chiarelli responding that he would not add roundabouts to driving exams in communities where roundabouts exist. Then there was the bizarre characterization from then-Transportation Minister Glen Murray that he wasn't interested in smaller issues like roundabouts and that I was disconnected from the real issues. I remind you that there are 42 roundabouts of varying size in Waterloo region today—up to 17 circles to be added by 2016—more than 20 in Ottawa and easily more than 100 across the province. There is no doubt that this is a real, and not a small, issue.

1430

That's not just me saying it. Brian Patterson of the Ontario Safety League has noted that "by implementing this bill we will increase safety, expand public education and reduce crashes in the community." Doug Switzer, the president and CEO of the Ontario Motor Coach Association, indicates, "With the increasing use of roundabouts by municipalities it's imperative that MTO establish standards for their safe design and construction."

Speaker, at this time, I'd also like to welcome a road safety partner we all know, CAA, Elliott Silverstein. Elliott, thanks for joining us today in the debate and thank you for your support.

Elliott, representing CAA South Central, tells us, "The Safe Roundabouts Act ... is designed to make roundabout

intersections safer for all road users. CAA is pleased to support his initiative in making Ontario's roads safer." Again, thank you, Elliott and CAA, for your ongoing work to make Ontario roads the safest in North America.

At last night's meeting of Waterloo regional council, the region of Waterloo passed the following motion. They said:

"Whereas there is an increase in the building of roundabouts by the province and municipalities across Ontario; and

"Whereas the Safe Roundabouts Act, 2015—Bill 65 is scheduled for debate in the Ontario Legislature;

"Therefore be it resolved that the regional municipality of Waterloo endorse the principles proposed in Bill 65, the Safe Roundabouts Act, 2015, and request the province of Ontario to review and amend the Highway Traffic Act to clarify legislation and/or regulations relating to roundabouts in order to enhance public safety, driver awareness and education, and enforcement mechanisms."

That was passed unanimously last night by Waterloo regional council, and I thank them for doing that.

Of course, last Friday, I was honoured to be joined at the Homer Watson-Block Line roundabout by Mr. Silverstein from CAA and Waterloo Regional Police Service Chief Bryan Larkin to support my efforts and ensure the safety enhancements the Safe Roundabouts Act would provide. Bottom line, this is not a small issue. This is not a solitary community issue. This isn't a blue, orange or red issue. It's just smart policy based on road safety.

Yet, much as the previous Ministers of Transportation chose to ignore my calls and tie on the blinders, my renewed efforts to get the attention of the current minister in letter, at committee and in the weeks leading up to today's debate have been met with a similar lack of urgency. He tells us, "The HTA ... already covers the actions a driver must take in a roundabout." The word "roundabout" is never mentioned once in the existing legislation. In the meantime, the silence of the HTA gives way to differing interpretations, with the provincial government and municipalities calling for different practices for signalling and yielding to pedestrians.

Right now, we have a situation in my area where the MTO tells drivers to "slow down and watch for pedestrians," whereas the region says, "Pedestrians go first. When entering or exiting the roundabout, drivers should yield the crosswalk to pedestrians." It's the same for signalling. While both the region and the province agree that drivers should signal right when exiting a roundabout, the region directs drivers planning a left turn, driving all or most of the way around the circle, to signal left, while the province is mute on left signalling.

Over in Ottawa, they're going through the same discussions and confusions. Ottawa's manager of traffic management, Greg Kent, has expressed his frustration with the city's inability to give pedestrians the right of way at roundabouts under provincial law. He, too, has highlighted the fact that the act doesn't define roundabouts yet, and he, too, has called for the MTO to update the law.

Without the guidance of one provincial law for all, the road is open for different areas to establish varying directions, leaving both drivers and pedestrians unsure as to how they are expected to navigate a roundabout. A motorist who follows the local rules, say in Waterloo region, may not necessarily be heeding the protocols of other areas.

It's a problem across the board. In my years of working on the issue, I've met with motorists of all types. Whether it's truck, bus or automobiles, the only consistency when it comes to roundabouts is the consistent concern for the lack of consistency. Truckers and other large vehicle operators I have spoken to, for instance, are faced with different challenges as they enter different municipalities across the province: varied lane widths, multiple lanes, varying locations for pedestrian crossings and conflicting rules for right of way. A little consistency would go a long way to enhancing safety right across Ontario.

The fact is, the lack of any mention whatsoever in the HTA leaves everyone—motorists, truckers, bus drivers, pedestrians and cyclists alike—with questions. When can I enter? How do I exit? Where do pedestrians cross? And ultimately, who has the right of way?

Speaker, to sum up, roundabouts in Ontario are a reality. They are here to stay. The need for rules is obvious, and the fix is easy and easily supportable by representatives of all stripes. I look forward to the members' input today and ask that when it comes to the vote, together, we take a united stand for the enhanced road safety that will result from passage of the Safe Roundabouts Act.

As Mr. Outhit from the Waterloo Region Record put it when I first introduced legislation for roundabout safety, "It's time to end the runaround on roundabouts. [Let's] rewrite the law."

Today, I'm hoping that we'll pass the first step in doing so. I of course look forward to the debate from my colleagues from around the House, and I'll conclude at that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to stand in this House in support of Bill 65, the Safe Roundabouts Act, 2015. One of the reasons I think it's so important for me to stand up and support the member from Kitchener-Conestoga on this is that there is this sort of thinking around this place that what happens in one riding doesn't necessarily affect others. The fact of the matter is that people don't just drive in their own ridings. Roundabouts are an emerging safety issue in the province of Ontario.

I must tell you, on a personal note, there was some resistance when roundabouts were first introduced to our riding, but people have become acclimatized to them because they recognize that there are environmental benefits and there is traffic flow. Waterloo region is one of those places—a good place to grow, and we are growing and we're trying to adapt to that, and we're trying to do it responsibly. But there is no doubt that the Ministry of Transportation has not kept up to date on this issue.

I think the asks the member from Kitchener-Conestoga has put forward in this bill are very reasonable: increased signage, safety; these are some things that we should be able to find some consensus on and work together on. In this context and in the environment of this Legislature, in these times, there are good reasons for us to try to find some consensus. Private members' bills, we all know, don't always go very far, but on the issue of safety and on the issue of modernizing our transportation infrastructure, I think that we should be able to find some common ground.

I would just like to say there are great inconsistencies across the province as it relates to roundabouts. Some local municipalities have installed inconsistent signage or created new, confusing rules for roundabouts, apparently unable to get consistent advice from the MTO. For example, the city of Ottawa recently installed signs requiring pedestrians to yield to cars at roundabout crosswalks, apparently believing—wrongly—that there are different Highway Traffic Act rules for roundabout crosswalks than other uncontrolled crosswalks. This has led to conflict between pedestrians, cyclists, cars, trucks and buses.

I must tell you, we've had some pretty close calls for students in Waterloo region. In 2011, a St. Mary's High School student was seriously injured at a roundabout. Another student was injured while crossing the same roundabout last year. We've had our first death, actually, very sadly, at a Waterloo roundabout, which occurred last year after a motorcycle entered into the roundabout.

There's a bit of urgency to actually modernizing this piece of legislation, and I wanted the member from Kitchener-Conestoga to know that he has recognized that this is a Waterloo region issue and that all MPPs from these ridings recognize this is an issue. We don't just drive in our own ridings.

The NDP is fully supporting this private member's bill. We hope that it passes, we hope that it gets to committee and we hope that the legislation is updated.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: It's interesting that all Waterloo region MPPs—my colleagues from Kitchener-Conestoga and also from Kitchener-Waterloo—are concerned about this. I always call Waterloo region the roundabout capital of Ontario. Do we know roundabouts. I certainly hear the concerns across all of our stakeholders and all of the members. I really want to thank them for their comments today.

1440

Bill 65 seeks to amend the Highway Traffic Act to enable the minister to make regulations establishing rules of the road that apply to roundabouts. I'm very pleased to rise today on behalf of my constituents in Cambridge to participate on this bill.

I'd like to begin by reiterating the fact that our government truly is proud of the fact that our roads are among the safest in North America, but there's always more that can be done.

The safety of our roads and those who use them are amongst the highest priorities for our government and, certainly, for all members in this House. We do know there's more that can be done, so that's why we've introduced bills like Bill 31, the Making Ontario's Roads Safer act, which is now being carefully considered and examined by members of the Standing Committee on General Government.

Bill 31 not only serves to protect drivers on our roads; it also introduces a number of provisions that will help keep pedestrians and cyclists safer in Ontario. It includes a provision that requires drivers to remain stopped at any pedestrian crossover or school crossing until those crossing the street are off the roadway.

Let me specifically speak to Bill 65. As previously mentioned, Bill 65 would amend the Highway Traffic Act to enable the Minister of Transportation to make regulations establishing rules of the road that apply to roundabouts. The bill also stipulates that before making a regulation, the minister must conduct a study about the safe use of roundabouts and must consult with members of the public. In addition, the minister is required to table a progress report in the Legislative Assembly every year until a regulation is made.

Roundabouts are very important parts of Ontario's roadways. In fact, roundabouts are proven to reduce pollution and fuel consumption and to reduce delays by limiting idling times and slowing down traffic.

I know this is an important local issue for all of those living in Waterloo region, and it's why all of us have spoken to the Minister of Transportation about this issue on many occasions. I, as the member from Cambridge, and the member from Kitchener Centre have also spoken to him on these occasions. Clearly, this is the intent as well behind Bill 65.

Though I agree with the principle behind Bill 65, there are a number of issues with the bill as it currently stands. The annual reporting section is particularly concerning, especially given that it comes from a party who purportedly despises what they refer to as the addition of any kind of government red tape. This section in particular would come at significant cost to the taxpayer, both in time and in money.

There's also some question about how Bill 65 intends to include roundabouts within the Highway Traffic Act. The Highway Traffic Act, as it stands now, contains existing rules that govern how a driver operates a motor vehicle on the highway. These rules are set out in such a way that they're adaptive to the situations that drivers encounter, and this includes roundabouts.

The HTA also references the type of traffic control that's used at intersections, such as stop signs, yield signs, traffic signals—or an uncontrolled intersection—rather than the specific type of intersection, such as T-intersections, Y-intersections, cross-intersections and roundabouts.

Drivers follow traffic rules based on the intersection's traffic control. Roundabouts are controlled by yield signs, so as a result, roundabouts are already covered under the HTA's definition of an intersection.

What's also interesting is that a jurisdictional scan across Canadian provincial traffic legislation reveals that while some provinces do include definitions for what a roundabout is, no province in Canada actually has additional rules of the road specific to the operation of a roundabout. That's why we believe it's important that we emphasize the importance of driver education rather than just to legislate this issue.

In terms of public education, I agree with the member from Kitchener-Conestoga and the member from Kitchener-Waterloo that we really do need to focus on more driver education. So far, the MTO has implemented guidelines and policies for the design of roundabouts on provincial highways and has implemented provincial standards for signs, pavement markings and lighting at roundabouts. In fact, the policies and guidelines for the design of roundabouts on provincial highways are also available in the MTO roundabout resources document. Municipalities that are considering putting roundabouts in their roadways may reference this document as well.

The ministry has also drafted an update to the Ontario Traffic Manual Book 15: Pedestrian Crossing Facilities and introduced Bill 31, as I previously mentioned, which will allow alternate treatments for pedestrian crossings to improve pedestrian safety at uncontrolled crossings. That also includes roundabouts.

But we know that public education is essential to encourage safe driving through a roundabout—not only from the ministry, but also from the municipalities that currently have roundabouts in Ontario. The official driver's handbook has been updated to provide drivers with information on how to safely drive through roundabouts. In particular, the handbook was expanded to include information on driving through roundabouts and dealing with particular situations at roundabouts.

In addition, the Ministry of Transportation continues to work with its road safety partners, especially within the region of Kitchener-Waterloo, to educate the public on the correct use of roundabouts. In partnership with the region of Waterloo's Active and Safe Routes to School committee, members have trained students and pedestrians on proper crossing through a roundabout. This is particularly important when you consider some of the issues that have happened outside schools in Waterloo region of recent years when it comes to negotiating pedestrians and vehicles through a roundabout.

The MTO also has an interactive website with information on roundabouts, including a brochure and a video that's available on the ministry's website. This is particularly important to those drivers who have been on the road for many years, are not attending driver's education programs right now and are not actually reading the current official driver's handbook.

Interestingly, my son Alex, who is now 21 years old, is currently going through a program for driver's education. He was out on the road yesterday, and so I and behold, he had to actually do a roundabout. So I called him last night and today to talk through his experience. What he told me was that not only in driver's education

did he get schooled on what he was to do and what signs to follow in a roundabout situation, but when he did the online training for the course, he was also given training online to know what to do in a roundabout, how to safely proceed through it and how to safely look to the signs and follow the yield signs through it. So yesterday was his first experience. He didn't tell his driver that I was working on not only roundabouts but also Bill 31. His experience was this: He approached the roundabout in a safe manner, he was able to enter and exit safely, and his driving instructor didn't have to make one comment. I'm very proud of that, and I think it speaks to our education program and how effective that's going to be.

In order to wrap up, Speaker, I just must say again that I do agree with the principle behind this bill. If it passes today, goes into committee and is brought forward for consideration, we'll have an opportunity at that time to hear from stakeholders and the public and possibly move amendments to strengthen the bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to speak briefly this afternoon on Bill 65, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to provide rules for the use of roundabouts, standing in the name of the member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

I was very pleased to hear the member for Cambridge just now, who I believe is also the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation, say that she agrees with the principle of Bill 65.

As we know, Mr. Speaker, the second reading vote on any piece of legislation, any bill, in this House is on the principle of the bill. While we may have some minor disagreement on some of the details, if we agree with the principle of the bill, we vote for the bill at second reading. That allows the bill then to be referred to a standing committee of the House where we can have more public hearings, more opportunity for people to talk about it—there's a number of groups, of course, that have an interest in this issue and would like to see it passed—and then we can discuss amendments. So I would take from that and I would hope that the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation has just recommended to her colleagues that they support the bill at second reading this afternoon and that we can get this bill passed.

1450

The member for Kitchener–Conestoga deserves enormous credit for the work that he does on behalf of his constituents in Kitchener–Conestoga. I was privileged to serve much of his riding when I was the MPP for Waterloo–Wellington. Those were great years for me, between 1999 and 2007. I have enormous affection for those communities and the good people of Waterloo region who I was privileged to serve for so many years. Michael Harris is doing a much better job than I ever did on their behalf, and I commend him for it.

This is a good bill. Of course, he has brought forward the concern that has, I think, originated in his community

about roundabouts and the need for consistency in terms of regulations. I think what he is bringing forward is very sensible. What he's suggesting is there needs to be an amendment to the highway act to "enable the minister to make regulations establishing rules of the road that apply to roundabouts. Before making a regulation, the minister must conduct a study about the safe use of roundabouts and must consult with members of the public. The minister is required to table a progress report in the Legislative Assembly every year until a regulation is made."

The very first time that I had the opportunity to drive on a roundabout was in Great Britain in, I think, 1993. Before my wife and I had children, we had a trip to Britain. We rented a car. Of course, I was driving on the left-hand side of the road from the right-hand seat and it was a bit more difficult than I thought it was going to be, but I was able to do it without incident or accident.

The first time we were on a roundabout, my wife was navigating beside me—she had the map. We got on the roundabout and I said, "Where do I get off?" She wasn't sure. We kept going around. I said, "I'm not getting off this roundabout until you tell me where to get off." We actually went around probably six times before we finally discovered the proper exit.

I say that in jest, to make fun of myself to some degree. But the fact is that I think for people using a roundabout for the first time, it does take some—you have to become accustomed to them. People do need to have the practice and the experience to feel confident using them safely.

I think the member is absolutely right. We need to have standardization of regulations. By bringing forward this bill this afternoon again, I think he's doing a public service for his constituents, not only in Waterloo region but across the province. I commend him for it, and I would encourage all members to support Bill 65 this afternoon when we get the chance to vote.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak on the Safe Roundabouts Act here today. As you've already heard earlier today, we will be supporting the bill.

This bill seeks to make sure that the roundabouts in this province are made safe and to properly educate drivers by giving municipalities clear instructions when it comes to putting up signs on roundabouts. I'm sure most of the people in this House know this is a relatively new issue for us here in North America. London, England, has been using roundabouts for almost a century, yet there were very few down in Niagara until relatively recently. They are growing throughout Ontario. This is not just an issue around Kitchener; we all drive around the province. But down in Niagara, they are growing. We now have been using them successfully in Niagara Falls. There's one on Mountain Road. There's one on Highway 55 which handles the traffic there and, of course, a beautiful one at Queenston Heights, right before you go to historic Queenston. Like I said yesterday when I stood up and

spoke, come on down to Niagara, enjoy our area, and now you get to enjoy the roundabouts. Hopefully you don't do like my colleague from the Progressive Conservative Party did and drive six times around it to figure out how to get off. I'm hoping it's a little easier in Queenston to do that.

The research on this seems to indicate that properly designed roundabouts can be a safer alternative. The key word here is "properly" designed. If a roundabout reduces speed to around 30 kilometres, it makes collisions on our roads less fatal to those involved. No one likes to talk about collisions on our roads, but they do happen. We can continue to work on making our roads safer, and this seems to be one way to do it. Though, I want to say it again: They must be properly designed.

If a roundabout doesn't properly address the speed of the cars or the flow of traffic, there is no evidence to support that they are better than a regular intersection with traffic lights. So that's important to note as we begin to see more and more roundabouts being built. They need to be properly designed to make our roads safer, and that's important for all of us.

Mr. Speaker, the idea behind roundabouts is simple: The car that is in the roundabout has the right of way, and the car entering the roundabout must yield to the drivers inside until there is a safe time for them to enter. So everybody understands a roundabout.

Outside of controlling the speed of cars, another major concern with the introduction of roundabouts is making sure that there is a clear rule on how pedestrians are to cross the roads. We've seen some of those incidents in Kitchener-Waterloo with some students.

Here in Ontario, it's commonly accepted that cars yield the right of way to pedestrians. Though this is more technical under the Highway Traffic Act, largely, cars will stop for someone crossing the road. Today in Ontario, roundabouts are controlled under the Highway Traffic Act as "uncontrolled intersections." The technical law here is that a car does not need to stop for a pedestrian until they are actually on the roadway. Now think about that. Let me repeat that: A car does not need to stop for someone until they have actually stepped on the road. It's not hard to see why that's pretty dangerous.

Outside of being dangerous, it's also very confusing. We have reports that at roundabouts in Ottawa people must yield to cars, and then in Waterloo, they're told to cross once a car has slowed down. So you can see in two cities in the same province, we have a different set of laws around how to cross a roundabout.

As for the act itself, it creates the definition for a roundabout that is added to the Highway Traffic Act. Considering the confusion that is already occurring around them, this not only makes sense, but it seems to me to be necessary.

From there the act allows the minister to make regulations concerning roundabout use, and it says that the minister must consult the public—this is important—before any regulation changes. We can talk about the education and how we do that, obviously, during the consultations.

Mr. Speaker, roundabouts are becoming very popular here in North America, and certainly very popular in my own riding of Niagara Falls. If built correctly, they can be used safely and protect our drivers and pedestrians. Clearly, something like this needs to have a definition in the Highway Traffic Act.

If there are already signs going up in different cities with different sets of rules, then it's also clear we have a problem. This act would give the minister the power to address these issues and to solve the problems. If we're going to become used to roundabouts, then this needs to happen, because, at the end of the day, it has to be done safely.

The number one goal of the Ministry of Transportation should be to keep our roads safe and to make sure our drivers and our pedestrians feel safe using those roads. There are roundabouts here in the province, and their regulation is falling behind. In order to make sure the ministry keeps our roads as safe as we'd like them to be, let's get some clarification on this issue.

I thank you very much for time to speak today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

1500

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I only have a couple of minutes, so I'll get right to the point.

One, no province in Canada is doing what has been asked and has rejected this when asked. Why? What do the traffic engineers tell you and what do most local municipalities tell you, having been a mayor of a city that introduced these in another province? There is one set of pedestrian priorities and controls for yield and stop at all intersections—all the same—whether it is a T-intersection, a Y-intersection, a cross intersection, a roundabout or any other. That is the law in Canada.

If we were to change it and you were in Kenora or you were in Ottawa, you would not see this changing on the other side of the border, because—to my friends from the Niagara Falls region—pedestrian priority is pedestrian priority. If you want to change that or strengthen it, there's something called the road user safety bill that is before this House right now, and it actually has a section on strengthening and clarifying the role of pedestrian priority in Ontario.

I have said to the member that I don't think we need another committee. Remember, I sat through the minority government where you and your colleagues read off every panel in committee we ever created, and it just kills me when you guys come back every time there is a difficult problem, and you want a committee.

Take some of the ideas that are in here—I'll give you credit; there are some very good ideas in here around education and around that. You could take the definition of a roundabout that is in the ministry's guidelines right now and apply it to the law. There are design standards that we put forward, consistent with every province. What you're suggesting is that Ontario have its own set of rules at a time when every transportation ministry for the last 20 years has had the same definition of pedestrian

priority at all intersections, has had the same standards apply, whether it's a T, a Y, a roundabout—whatever it is—and those are consistent.

I even raised this with my colleagues when I was at the transportation ministry, and I got the same reaction from their traffic engineers. So, if you want to have a patchwork of different rules, that's it; or you're going to have to define every type of intersection in law, which would be kind of crazy.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'd like to yield my minute and 44 seconds back to him.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I think there are real issues here—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Minister, thank you. Your time is up.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to welcome one of my constituents here, who was already introduced: Elliott Silverstein from CAA.

As Elliott knows, there have been some new roundabouts in the Thornhill Woods neighbourhood in my riding. They're quite close to a school, and they were designed very wide, so that cars actually did not even have to slow down in the roundabouts. I heard many complaints, as did Elliott, I'm sure. People were not trained to drive in roundabouts. Many people said they had never driven in a roundabout, and they were concerned for their kids' safety. The schools were concerned because the roundabouts were very close to schools.

I think we have to sort of say to ourselves that either we're going to be a province where we have roundabouts on a regular basis that people are used to—as the member from Cambridge said, even if you're trained to drive in a roundabout in driver's education, if 10 years go by before you're actually in one, that's not going to make you feel very comfortable. The last thing we need, Mr. Speaker, is drivers getting on the road in snowy conditions or icy conditions and coming into a roundabout for the first time.

What I question is: Why have roundabouts in some areas? It does keep the flow of traffic. We're all frustrated when we see traffic lights where there's no traffic crossing and we're sitting and waiting at a red light; it's not a busy time of day. And we think to ourselves, "Well, there must be a better way. It's not very environmental; it's very time-consuming for the public."

I think that roundabouts do have their place, where maybe we need something more than a stop sign or something instead of a stop sign where cars are coming to a complete stop and oftentimes there's no traffic around, and that creates a lot of pollution and damage to the cars in wear and tear.

On the other hand, traffic signals are very expensive. We don't want to be putting up traffic signals in the middle of neighbourhoods. There are options. Right near my home there's a traffic signal where only a pedestrian can trigger it.

So I think that I do support the member from Kitchener-Conestoga. I went to university in Waterloo, and I guess it was so long ago that I can't recall any roundabouts in the area, but I think that if pedestrians aren't used to them—there are two universities, Wilfrid Laurier and Waterloo, in or near his riding. The students come from other areas all over the province. They're distracted. They're young. They're in a rush. If they are having to cross through roundabouts without being comfortable, driving through the roundabouts without ever having driven through a roundabout before, I think that we can do better.

Roundabouts need to be uniform throughout the province, as my colleague said. The only thing that's consistent is the lack of consistency. I would mention that I find the same thing with handicapped parking, where the municipalities set the rules and people can go from one riding or municipality to another and experience different rules over handicapped parking. That is very unfortunate, because the last thing we want to do is make it very difficult for people who are having to park their car under difficult circumstances themselves or with a relative who requires help.

Just one look at the ministry web page on roundabouts underlines this lack of consistency about what a roundabout is and whether they're safe for pedestrians.

As an optometrist, I'm concerned about the visually impaired in roundabouts, cyclists, older drivers. How can they accommodate large trucks and equipment? I would also mention this: How can they accommodate snow clearing? I think we can see, just beside Queen's Park on Harbord, that the bike lane is often full of snow. We're designing bike lanes for summer conditions while we're encouraging people to ride their bikes in the winter without the right kind of snow-clearing equipment available for them.

I'm happy to support my colleague and to make roundabouts safe.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I just want to add a voice of support to the bill. I heard what the minister opposite had to say, but listen, it's got to start somewhere. If we took that approach, basic things like health care wouldn't exist in this land. It took a government in Saskatchewan to be offside with every province and the federal government here in Canada to put in place health care. So if we have to wait for the 10 provinces—or 11 provinces, depending on how you count it—and the federal government getting together, that's like trying to amend the "notwithstanding" clause of the Constitution. It ain't gonna happen.

Sorry; I appreciate the argument, but somebody has got to lead and, quite frankly, Ontario at times leads on things. The Premier, for example, is trying to lead a

discussion on pension reform. If we were to wait for every other province and if we were to wait for the federal government, none of this would be done. So to make an argument, "You can't do this because we're going to be off-step and out of sync with the other provinces," is not the way the Canadian experience has been.

I will just say that the first time I was in a roundabout—and I want to admit it wasn't in Ontario; it was somewhere where the sun was nicer and they certainly had better wine et du très bon manger, au sud de la France. It was confusing, the first time that you went in it, but once you got the concept it was actually quite good. The sense that I got—and I'm not an expert on this—was that it's a heck of a lot safer. T-bone accidents, when it comes to cars smashing into the side of somebody because they blow a stop—the worst that could happen there is that you glance off them on the side, which has probably a higher degree of survivability. So I say let's pass this bill. Let's get on.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm proud to support my colleague Michael Harris from Kitchener—Conestoga and I commend him for bringing this bill forward. He's always thinking of the safety of his constituents first and foremost, and this is another one of those.

I believe he brought this bill in response to some troubling crash statistics for roundabouts in his riding, namely the roundabout at Homer Watson Boulevard and Block Line Road in Kitchener. I also understand the regional chief of police is concerned and supports the member's call for clarity with respect to roundabout rules so that all motorists have that confidence behind the wheel.

I support Bill 65. I believe we need consistent rules for roundabouts in an effort to improve road safety for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists across Ontario.

This bill outlines specific steps and actions required of the Minister of Transportation.

1510

(1) To consult: The minister must conduct a study and consult with the public about the safe use of roundabouts;

(2) To report: The minister is required to table a progress report every year until a regulation to address the safe use of roundabouts is made; and

(3) To act: Following consultation, the minister is to make regulations establishing rules of the road that apply to roundabouts.

Currently, motorists are not familiar with the rules of using a roundabout. Road users are not clear on the use of crosswalks, signs and markings, lighting, commercial vehicles, speed limits, signalling, entering and exiting roundabouts, uniformity of road design standards, including consistency in lane width and compliance with accessibility standards.

We need to take concrete steps, as outlined in my colleague's bill, promote safety and make them user-friendly for all.

The Blue Mountain Resort roundabout was Grey county's first roundabout. Opened in 2009 by my

colleague Jim Wilson from Simcoe—Grey and currently our interim leader—a joint venture among Grey county, the Blue Mountains, Blue Mountain Resort and the federal government. The partners used the gas tax revenues they received from the federal government for the project.

Closer to home for me, the Alvanley roundabout: Since the province has been silent in its responsibility to fund this project, I will use this opportunity to now remind the Minister of Transportation that his government has a responsibility to fund it. Bruce and Grey counties proposed years ago to build a roundabout at the intersection of Highway 21 at Alvanley and the Grey-Bruce county line. County engineers believe that the roundabout would help prevent crashes because motorists must slow down to negotiate the curved roadway. So the counties asked MTO to include the roundabout work as part of the province's planned \$8.8-million rehabilitation of Highway 21 from Port Elgin to Alvanley in 2014.

According to local Georgian Bluffs mayor Al Barfoot: "Design drawings were finished many months ago and the project is virtually construction ready." The province has had since "2013 to complete the work" needed for this roundabout.

So what's stalling it? The MTO—they're playing hooky. In fact, MTO wrote the counties to say, "If you agree to pay for the roundabout, we'll prioritize it." Clearly, MTO is expressly ignoring the fact that the intersection is part of a provincial highway and connecting links, so MTO is responsible for covering the cost of the project.

Minister, your ministry has made statements about the roundabouts being good solutions for rural areas with minimal pedestrian traffic, and having the ability to accommodate farm machinery and large trucks. Clearly, we're talking about provincial highways and connecting links, which fall under your jurisdiction. Your office has had maybe 50 or so provincial roundabouts in various stages of planning, design and construction across the province. Why are you playing hot potato with the roundabout at the intersection of Highway 21 and the Grey-Bruce line? Perhaps you'll reconsider sharing the gas tax revenues with us rural folks.

Mr. Speaker, on a personal note: My wife, Michaela, is from Morecambe, Lancashire in England. We went there for our honeymoon, and I have to say that was my first experience with a roundabout. It was a bit crazy at times, driving on the wrong side of the road and the wrong side of the car. We came to this roundabout, and I missed her turnoff for Morecambe, Lancashire, and Morecambe Bay where she's from. She had a bit of a fit because I missed this turn. I said, "Relax. You just go in the circle. We'll catch it the second time around."

I thoroughly thought it was an efficient system. I believe they're very safe. I think there's something that they're actually adding to our congestion challenges in some of our areas—in a lot of places.

Randy Pettapiece, my colleague from Perth—Wellington, has them. Certainly Jim Wilson's riding and

Michael's riding, in a lot of places—I think they're great additions. It takes a bit, of course, for people to get to know them, but once they're on to them, they're very efficient and very safe.

I commend my colleague Michael Harris once again for bringing the safety of not only his constituents but all Ontarians to the floor with this bill, and I support it fully.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I remind the member once more that we refer to our colleagues by riding, not first names, not names—

Mr. Bill Walker: Oh, Kitchener—Conestoga. Sorry, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

I go back to the member for Kitchener—Conestoga. You have two minutes.

Mr. Michael Harris: First, I would like to thank the members who chimed in on the debate this afternoon on Bill 65, the Safe Roundabouts Act. Of course, my colleague from Kitchener—Waterloo, Catherine Fife—I definitely want to thank her for her comments and support of this bill, as well as my own colleague from Wellington—Halton Hills, Ted Arnott. The member for Niagara who now obviously has roundabouts in his beautiful city of Niagara Falls—I look forward to getting up there and experiencing some of those roundabouts, as well as all of the other good things in Niagara. Of course, the Minister of the Environment, the members for Timmins—James Bay and Thornhill and, finally, my colleague from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound: Thanks for their input and consideration of the very real safety enhancements that could result from passage of the Safe Roundabouts Act.

I also want to thank those who have endorsed the direction of my bill as we move forward in today's debate. Again, the CAA, Elliott Silverstein is here with us today—thank you for joining us; the Ontario Safety League; the Ontario Motor Coach Association; the Waterloo Regional Police Service, and, of course, our new police chief, Bryan Larkin, who I know will also be making it an issue at the chiefs of Ontario traffic committee; and, of course, Waterloo regional council, who, last night, passed unanimously a resolution in support of the overall themes within the bill.

With regard to some of the ministry's or other members' comments that the HTA, as it stands, currently already covers the actions a driver must take in a roundabout, I would point out one more time that the word "roundabout" does not even appear once in the act. It is a clear omission that needs to be addressed.

Speaker, I look forward to the vote this afternoon—I've only got 10 seconds left—that will result in enhancing and being a leader—not only in Ontario, but across Canada and North America—in road safety by incorporating roundabouts within the Highway Traffic Act and creating rules for their safe use.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll take the vote on this item at the end of regular business.

RIGHT TO CARE ACT (CHILDREN 16 YEARS OF AGE AND OLDER), 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LE DROIT AUX SOINS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ENFANTS DE 16 ANS ET PLUS

Mr. McDonell moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 54, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act with respect to children 16 years of age and older / Projet de loi 54, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille en ce qui concerne les enfants de 16 ans et plus.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'd like to start by welcoming some people in the west gallery: Julie Despaties, Layla Beswarick and Ilaria Ambruoso from the Adopt4Life group. I'm glad to see you out today.

On this note, I'd like to start out by acknowledging the passionate and determined work put into the bill's predecessor, Bill 88, by former member for Barrie Rod Jackson. He championed the cause by allowing 16- and 17-year-old children the same rights that we grant other children who need protection during such a key stage in their personal development. Through Rod's strong advocacy and commitment, the House came together in unanimous support for Bill 88 at second reading and a constructive discussion at the Standing Committee on Social Policy. However, the bill never received third reading, despite having sat for four months on the order paper waiting for it.

When Premier Wynne called the 2014 election, Bill 88 died at the last stage of its parliamentary journey. This House missed an opportunity to afford Ontario's children aged 16 and 17 the same protection and support we offer their younger peers. Today, we can seize that opportunity at last.

Today, children aged 16 and 17 who need care and aid, whether it be because of their families becoming abusive or their guardians passing away or for a myriad of other reasons, and are left to fend for themselves—unfortunately, they get very little help, not even qualifying for much of the social safety net that is in place for adults.

So what are their options? If they don't have a family to fall back on and don't qualify for assistance from our government, well, frankly, they're quite limited. They need to navigate the homeless shelter system and try to get what they can get from Ontario Works and other services that are designed for adults. In many cases, they fall prey to the darker side of our society: forced to beg or steal to get the food they need; forced to live on the streets or to join a gang for protection. You can see that, whatever they do, getting a high school education becomes very difficult, if not impossible.

Children's aid societies have the experience and the staff to ensure that the child is appropriately cared for.

They could arrange for a formal temporary care agreement, if only the legislation allowed them to. Today, it does not. Children's aid societies in Ontario have the ability to arrange care, to place them in foster homes and even to facilitate adoption. Any child who has received these services before the age of 16 can return to them as a client up to the age of 18 and sometimes beyond. My local children's aid society would gladly help any child who reaches out to them for help, but they are frustrated by the current restrictions in the Child and Family Services Act because they know the consequences of not providing care.

1520

The Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth has supported the extension of CASs' ability to provide care beyond a child's 16th birthday. I quote from the advocate's submission on the Child and Family Services Act Review: "By setting the age of protection at 16, the CFSA is inconsistent with other legislation and creates a barrier to service for those between 16 and 18 who may not qualify for adult service systems and are legally barred from the child welfare system. Currently, youth aged 16 to 18 have very limited access to financial support from Ontario Works and no access to the Ontario Disability Support Program and are required to [be] in school so cannot work to support themselves. Youth aged 16 to 18 living in an abusive situation may have no choice but to stay because they are unable to access either the adult or child system."

No one in Ontario should have to endure an abusive situation due to a lack of options. This is especially true for children of all ages, whose attainment of their full potential depends on a supportive and nurturing home. A Homeless Hub report stated that it is argued that "for young people, the need to get them into housing with appropriate supports as soon as possible is paramount. We know from research that the longer a young person is absolutely homeless or comes to rely on emergency services, the greater their entrenchment in the street youth lifestyle, the more estranged they become from mainstream services, the worse their health (mental health and addictions) becomes, the greater likelihood of their experiencing crime and violence as well as sexual and economic exploitation."

This is just one reason why we need to close the current gap in the Child and Family Services Act. It condemns children fleeing an abusive environment to homelessness. Homeless youth are extremely likely to become victims of violent crime. During the second reading debate on this issue, MPP Rod Jackson highlighted that 76% of homeless youth will be a victim of a violent crime. That is almost 13 times the national average, according to Statistics Canada, and it should give us all cause for concern.

Children aged 16 or 17 might seek children's aid society help for a variety of reasons. Their caregivers could pass away or become incapacitated. This is an especially likely scenario for children in single-parent families with little or no extended family in the region. Their parents or

caregivers could be struggling with addictions, mental illness or trouble with the justice system.

We envision the family unit as the solid bedrock of our society, and may at times take it for granted. Yet it is the duty of our support system to be there for all family members when the family home faces such challenges.

Today, children aged 16 and 17 fall through the cracks, disqualified from the child welfare system and too young to access and navigate the adult one. The purpose of Bill 88 is to offer protection and/or support of the province to these youth, 16 and 17 years old, who are in situations, through no fault of their own, where they must leave their home.

During the pre-budget consultations in Toronto, we heard from the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. They spoke of the need to look at the current funding model to reflect local service delivery realities, but highlighted that we need to change the legislation to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to access CAS temporary care agreements.

This would naturally entail an increased workload for children's aid societies, who will require extra funding to shoulder the added costs. Quantifying these costs is hard, since CASs do not keep track of the clients they refuse.

Statistics from the province of Alberta, however, show that the number of 16- and 17-year-olds in temporary care is under 3% of the total number of children in temporary care across the province. But one must note that this 3% also includes the clients who were there before they turned 16 and who currently would be looked after under Ontario's current legislation today. The real number is likely much smaller, probably closer to 1% or less.

This leads us to the significant economic argument in support of providing 16- and 17-year-old children with children's aid society care when they request it. Estimates put the cost of caring for a homeless youth through shelters, the police and emergency health services at almost \$8,000 per month. Despite this, as I said before, homeless youth are 13 times more likely than the average Canadian to be a victim of violent crime. Those children who stay with their families without the proper care are less likely to perform well in school, jeopardizing their career and social and economic prospects. They also run a higher risk of dropping out of education altogether.

The economic, social and human cost of doing nothing is enormous. Our social service systems see increased demand from high-needs clients, and they need to operate efficiently. Children who can't access the care they deserve can't fully benefit from our education and training systems, making them less competitive in a global marketplace, and preventing them from pursuing and developing their talents.

By abandoning 16- and 17-year-olds in their times of need, we are depriving ourselves and our children of future teachers, doctors and innovators. As MPP Jackson highlighted in his speech on Bill 88, the estimated cost of delivering children's aid society services to a 16-year-old or a 17-year-old in temporary care is likely to be approximately \$1,000 a month, much less than the other costs.

The case for expanding CAS care is clear: Eight children can receive care and guidance in a safe and healthy environment for the same funds that it would take to care for one homeless child through social and emergency services.

Children's aid societies are focusing on delivering strong preventive services to ensure children can stay with their families rather than be taken into care. In their last report, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies highlighted the decline in total crown ward numbers and the rise in services delivered to families. We should embrace this proactive and preventive approach and see Bill 54 for what it is: a chance for this Legislature to help prevent the social outcomes of child homelessness and neglect by allowing trusted experts to arrange care before the child's life and prospects are put into jeopardy.

I hope all members will take the opportunity to give Ontario's children the best chance to succeed in life. The last time this bill was debated at second reading, it received unanimous support. It sailed through committee with the same spirit of co-operation of all three parties. But sadly, it sat waiting for third reading and royal assent for more than four months, and the rest is history. The bill died when the June 12 election was called.

Since most of the members who were here then for second reading are still here today, I trust and hope that it will receive support from all three parties again today. In our caring society, it is the very least that we should be doing.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would ask all members in the House to join me in welcoming the member for Barrie in the 40th Parliament, Mr. Rod Jackson.

Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to be able to weigh in on this debate today. As we know, I come to this Legislature from the classroom, and I am very pleased to be able to speak about children as a priority, because children matter. Children are more than our future; they are our foundation. As a society and as a province, it is our responsibility to support children as they grow and find their way.

Unfortunately, though, some of our youth get lost along the way. When this happens, it should be our collective responsibility to ensure that there is a supportive framework to help them regain their footing. Unfortunately for some of our vulnerable youth, there is no framework and there is often no path forward. The youth who fall into the gap between 16 and 18, who find themselves in need of services and support, are left to fend for themselves, no longer protected as children and not yet eligible for adult services.

As recognized by the United Nations in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children under 18 are human beings with rights. Accordingly, children have the right to play, to learn, to be and feel safe, and to life without discrimination of any kind. Children have the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's

physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, according to the United Nations. They have internationally recognized and ratified rights when it comes to education, alternative care, justice and incarceration.

1530

Across nearly all of Ontario's systems, minors—those under 18—are considered to be children. At the federal level, however, youth at any age are protected from discrimination based on age, according to the federal Human Rights Code, which is consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, Ontario seems to have a few divergent areas and laws when it comes to youth in the gap between 16 and 18. Children, regardless of age, deserve to be fairly treated and to have equitable access to opportunity and to care.

In Ontario, access to social supports and protection of internationally recognized rights are affected by age. In fact, and in law, the definition of "child" changes within legislation, depending on the benefit.

According to section 1 of the Child and Family Services Act, "The paramount purpose of this Act is to promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children." By definition, as written in subsection 3(1) of the act, "child" means a person under the age of 18 years." However, later in the same act, under part III, "Child protection," subsection 37(1), "child" does not include a child as defined in" the earlier section "who is actually or apparently 16 years of age or older...."

Under this section, with the restricted definition of "child," the legislation outlines the law protecting children, determines what constitutes risk and situations where a child might have need of protection, defines best interests of the child, and outlines the laws surrounding legal representation of the child.

So within the same piece of legislation, a child is both defined as a person under 18 and later as a person not older than 16. Why the discrepancy? Surely the rationale cannot be one of stakeholder concern, as voices from the international human rights community, education sector, justice system, youth, and child and youth advocacy groups are calling for consistency, non-discrimination and fair access to services for our vulnerable youth.

Coming back to education: As stated in the Education Act, "A person has the right, without payment of a fee, to attend a school in a school section, separate school zone or secondary school district, as the case may be, in which the person is qualified to be a resident pupil." This may be a right, but due to the design, it is also a significant challenge for many vulnerable students who want to attend school and/or graduate. Inflexible compulsory course requirements and attendance and residence restrictions can create insurmountable challenges for graduation.

These vulnerable 16- to 18-year-old students should warrant special consideration. Without fair or sufficient access to services or support, these children are more likely to struggle to afford life, secure accommodation and consistently attend school. Many students who struggle with attendance are also sometimes struggling to

make money, make scheduled court dates, attend appointments and navigate various challenges. It makes sense to consider common challenges and offer flexibility and productive solutions, rather than punitive measures, to keep students in school. Students who want to graduate but are struggling should be encouraged and supported, not shamed and prevented from success. There seems to be no end to the examples of systemic hurdles that await our vulnerable youth, but I digress.

We do not adequately support our province's children in this 16- to 18-year age gap. The Canadian Foundation for Children, Youth and the Law's operating arm, Justice for Children and Youth, is an organization that promotes and defends the rights and dignity of young people. They have provided legal representation to young Ontarians since 1978. They describe that the situation is as follows:

"Many of the young people who seek the assistance of Justice for Children and Youth are ineligible for child welfare services simply on the basis of their age. Youth needing care after they turn 16 are left with few choices to provide for their safety and security, often leaving them with no option but the shelter system or the streets. A young person may need care for the first time, or may need care again after having been 'out of care.' In either circumstance, currently they generally have no access."

Even worse is that Ontario is the only Canadian jurisdiction that has neither protective nor voluntary services to non-special needs children presenting for help at ages 16 to 17—worth noting.

Since I have been elected, some of us may recall the recently passed Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act. I'm going to speak to that for a second. According to the government, they improved the oversight of services to children and youth in care by amending the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007. However, according to the advocate, the amendments will allow the office to conduct investigations "in only one area of our mandate: children receiving services from a children's aid society or residential licensee following a children's aid society placement." Again, it seems that these vulnerable youth aged 16 to 18 without access to provincial care will further be disadvantaged by this piece of legislation.

My Real Life Book, which some of us might be familiar with, was a dynamic report that presented the learning and recommendations that were compiled in 2011 by the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth and the Youth Leaving Care Hearings team. In response to that, the government has responded with some new initiatives to help youth transition into adulthood. Interestingly, though, many of the initiatives address some recommendations, but again conspicuously absent are any initiatives to expand services to more children in need.

I would ask the government, whose priority, then, are the children outside of CAS's legislated reach? Because according to the report, children in care are the number one priority. So can it be assumed, then, that children who are currently blocked from care might at least be the number two priority?

Without sufficient support, many of our youth have no better or safer option than to live on the street. How many of our homeless youth in Ontario have been denied access to care as a result of the timing of their 16th birthday? How many of our homeless youth had access to transitional support when they aged out of care? What is the cost of raising our youth out of the system and on the streets?

As we know, in 2013 private member's Bill 88, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act with respect to children 16 years of age and older, was introduced here and was the predecessor of this bill. Proposed amendments include a new purpose, which is "To recognize that services provided under the act should be provided in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child..." Great.

My colleague from Hamilton Mountain weighed in on that debate, and I'd like to bring her voice into this discussion here today. She said at that time:

"Currently, we are saying to 16- and 17-year-olds who are perhaps in an abusive situation at home, 'Tough luck. There's nothing we can do to help you out.' That's simply not acceptable. We give them no options, no supports, and for many the only escape is the streets. What sort of escape is that? ... It's a sad reality, and there are way too many people out there ready to exploit these youth. But escape they must. Home is a place that for most of us is a refuge, a place of comfort and unconditional love, but for them it is a place even more terrifying than the street."

"The hard thing to understand is the fact that these kids, if they were in the system before the age of 16, could be in care until the age of 18. But if they're over 16 when they first come to the attention of the child welfare agencies, the Child and Family Services Act says that we cannot get involved. It makes absolutely no sense. We're letting our youth down, and quite frankly, I think we're letting ourselves down in this House. The fact that we keep youth in care until the age of 18 means that we recognize that 16 is too young to expect them to be able to support themselves."

I'm pleased to be able to share those thoughts from my colleague from Hamilton Mountain.

The government at that time did claim to support the intent of the bill but, as we saw in committee, was concerned with costs and therefore wanted to extend discussion and consultation, and to postpone indefinitely the date the legislation could take effect.

I have a lot of thoughts on this bill; I'm just figuring out where I am.

At the time, the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth released a statement in support of raising the age of protection to include vulnerable 16- and 17-year-olds. In his statement, he said, "Correcting the systemic gap is long overdue. We can no longer turn our back on children who are living in an abusive situation and in need of support and services."

As we know, currently there are few options for this vulnerable group, and we're here today to talk about

fixing that and closing this gap. Ontario should not discriminate against its own children based on age. As prioritized in the recommendations made by the United Nations, we need to prioritize this here in Ontario.

I have way too many thoughts to share, and I am clearly running out of time. Okay, I'll come back to the argument of cost, and we'll head that off, because hopefully we won't hear that from the government side.

Cost is an interesting argument to make when it comes to children. What is the lifelong cost of neglecting our children today? What are the social, systemic and economic costs of creating a vulnerable demographic of citizens who are forced to live on the street without access to education or any means of contributing to society or their own security? What is the cost of a lifetime of social assistance once children are finally old enough to qualify and have no foundation of education or skills on which to build a future?

1540

Surely the province of Ontario is up to the challenge of being accountable to its children, and I am pleased to call on the government and everyone in this House to support this bill and this initiative and thereby support our children and our future.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: First of all, I want to thank the member for introducing the bill and for his concern for youth over the age of 16. I'd also like to thank him for his attention to the needs of vulnerable children and youth in his role as my critic, as Minister of Children and Youth Services. I also recognize that the former member who introduced the bill is here today, so that's great.

I share your concerns for vulnerable young people in this province. As you may recall, in the last Legislature my predecessor spoke to this when it was called Bill 88. I understand the bill is back unchanged, so we can just focus on the bill itself.

As we all know, under the Child and Family Services Act, temporary care agreements can be made for children who are under the age of 16. A person who is temporarily unable to care for a child in his custody may make a voluntary written agreement with a society for the society's care and custody of a child. The paramount purpose of the act is to promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children.

As I think everyone here knows, this act must be reviewed every five years, and we're currently doing just that. These reviews are an excellent opportunity to consult Ontarians, including families and youth themselves, about what's working and what needs to change. For this year's review, I thought it was important that we ask some very specific questions about areas of concern. That's why we've made supporting older youth a key focus of the review. I look forward to releasing our report on our consultations in the very near future. In fact, I'll be releasing that right here in the Legislature. While I share the member's desire to improve supports and outcomes for older youth, I want to ensure that we give the

results of those consultations full consideration as we determine how best to proceed.

Of course, I want to highlight some of the measures we've already taken to support older youth by following the advice of the Youth Leaving Care Working Group to develop new resources and support to help youth leaving care. For example, we raised the monthly financial supports to youth receiving continued care and support from the ages of 18 to 20 to \$850, which is an increase of \$187. We also provide \$500 per month during the school year to youth aged 21 to 24 enrolled in the Ontario Student Assistance Program, also known as OSAP, for eligible post-secondary education and training programs; this is through the Living and Learning Grant.

We also allow those youth who have left care at the age of 16 or 17 to voluntarily enter an agreement with a children's aid society to receive supports up to the age of 18. We provide savings to youth at the age of 18 through the Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent, OCBE, a savings program to help them in their transition to independent living. We also provide prescription drugs, dental and extended health benefits to young people between the ages of 21 and 24.

Despite these initiatives, it is critical that we do more to serve vulnerable youth aged 16 and up. As I mentioned, my ministry is carefully considering how we can improve services to them. I will also add that it's very important to recognize that the needs of teenagers are very different than those of younger children. I have two 17-year-olds myself right now, so I'm very mindful of that.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Twins?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Twins. Yes, I have twins.

It's important that we find the most appropriate approach to supporting them because what works for a seven-year-old may not work for a 17-year-old. Offering child welfare services to older youth is different as they approach early adulthood, as they could be offered more autonomy when deciding which services would serve them best.

While the bill is a good first step, I believe there are some areas where it could be improved if it is to move forward to committee. For example, the bill does not address how 16- and 17-year-olds who lack capacity to consent may enter into a temporary care agreement. As such, we build, I think, further work into that to determine how to ensure temporary care agreement supports are available to 16- and 17-year-olds who lack capacity to consent.

This isn't a new issue either, Speaker. This concern was identified in written submissions made by Pro Bono Law Ontario at SickKids to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills for Bill 88, this bill's predecessor. The introduction of their letter to the standing committee states:

"We are concerned with young people, who due to lack of capacity, cannot make a written agreement for the society's care and custody when the parent or legal guardian who has custody of the child is unable or

unwilling to provide adequate care. In particular, the problem is exacerbated in cases where the parent or guardian, who is the substitute decision maker by law, is not willing or able to act in the best interests of their child, which in some cases is to enter into the care and custody of the children's aid society."

Going forward, I think we need to listen to that. We need to listen to the voices of young people as well. That's precisely why here on the Liberal government side we created the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities. I had the pleasure to meet with the council just this past Monday. I was very impressed by their passion, their wisdom and their insight.

As we all know, this government also created the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, and just a few months ago our government introduced Bill 8, which expanded the powers of the provincial advocate and which I'm very glad the House has passed. That expansion includes investigatory powers into the child welfare sector.

In summary, Speaker, I'm very proud of the work that's been done so far in Ontario to serve our youth, and our government is committed to work to do even more. And although I believe this bill needs a bit more work to ensure that it fully meets the needs of vulnerable youth in the most appropriate way, I do want to thank the member for bringing the bill forward and I'll be very pleased to support it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Bill Walker: I commend my colleague and friend Jim McDonell, the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, for bringing this bill back to the House yet again.

This bill looks to honour the United Nations convention with respect to children. Currently, we're the only jurisdiction in the developed world that does not provide adequate resources for children who go into care at the age of 16, 17 or 18. Right now, if you're a child and you go into care and you're 15 years old, you get support through children's aid services and other provisions up until the age of 21. If, however, you go into care when you're 16, then you have absolutely no resources available to you, aside from perhaps Ontario Works. It's discriminating. It's a violation of the human rights charter of Canada. We need to make it right, Speaker. If we want to prevent youth homelessness, if we want to help all kids get an equal opportunity at life, then we need to support Bill 54.

As a former PC critic for children and youth, I have had the privilege of meeting and hearing from key stakeholders. I enjoyed being at the Feathers of Hope presentation at Queen's Park, a First Nations forum that gave us a number of sensible recommendations.

As the critic, I also enjoyed my chats with the children's advocate. I'm pleased to have had the honour of meeting and receiving feedback and guidance on youth issues from Irwin Elman, who is in the gallery today, whose opinion I continue to respect. Mr. Elman

has established himself as the pre-eminent voice of Ontario's often voiceless youth, and I commend him and his office for their leadership and advocacy over the years in establishing that youth platform that we did not have before.

Having worked closely on this file, I've been schooled in the gaps and challenges facing our children in the context of their rights. As you're aware, this is not the first time this bill is before the House. It was first introduced as Bill 88, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act, by my good friend and former MPP for Barrie, Rod Jackson, who is in the gallery today as well. Rod was and is a member who was always mindful of issues concerning children's rights and dignity. He used his time here at Queen's Park to bring awareness to issues of unfairness and to empower youth by advocating—and effectively so—for Ontario's most vulnerable youth. It reflects how classy a guy he is that he's here in the House again to show his support and continued commitment to supporting our youth. Some of you may recall his Bill 102 to ban the use of blocker pads on vulnerable children. It's unfortunate that in both cases the government failed to act.

In the case of the "right to care" bill, which passed committee, the government sat on it for four months until it died on the order paper. This Liberal government had the ability to move that through and did not yet again. I urge them not to repeat the same mistake again. I urge them to do the honourable thing: Support Bill 54 and make it legislation and fix this human rights violation. It's deplorable if this doesn't—my understanding is it went through committee and had all of the amendments made, it was accepted, it was unanimous, and it sat there for four months. And now I've just heard in the House that it needs more tweaking.

1550

Well, I thought, from what I was told, it went through and everything was accepted, Mr. Speaker. So it's truly my hope that if people really care about these youth who are truly in a gap, they'll step up and do the right thing today. When we vote in an hour or two from now, this is the opportunity for the government to step up—all parties, all three of us in this House—to show unanimous support for our youth, to do the right thing, to do the honourable thing and make sure that this becomes legislation and we fill that gap so no youth out there has to suffer the way they have up until now.

I again want to commend Rod Jackson, my former colleague from Barrie; and my good friend and critic in this portfolio, Jim McDonell from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry, for all of the work that they have done over the years and in my time here and continue to do. Again, thank you to Irwin Elman, our children and youth advocate, for all that they do.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Chris Ballard: I'd also like to thank the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry for this bill and Minister MacCharles for providing remarks on this bill.

This is such an important topic, one that is very important to me and one that I'm delighted to speak about this afternoon. It should go without saying that the youth of this province are the future of Ontario. Protecting them is of the utmost importance, especially when it comes to those who are most at risk. Whether they're facing homelessness, mental illness or just trouble at home, there is much we can do and should do to protect their well-being.

Young people in our society are facing an array of stresses and situations that we, as adults, never had to deal with. Pressure is increasing on all sides, and many of our youth are unable or lack the knowledge to cope with these stresses.

Teenagers over the age of 16 face a unique situation compared to their younger peers. These individuals must often have a full understanding of the conditions they find themselves in, but being minors under the law they often lack the ability to make the decisions that could help them. Proposed changes in accordance to advice received by the ministry would, I believe, correct many of the concerns outlined in this proposed legislation. That does not, however, mean we should not consider this private member's bill and the potential benefits that it could bring to all the young people of Ontario.

Supporting youth who are on the cusp of adulthood is not just the right thing to do morally; it makes economic sense as well. By helping individuals transition into adulthood with greater ease, we reduce the likelihood they will have to rely on costly services in the future.

While many services offered by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services are of the utmost importance, they can also be extraordinarily expensive. In addition, these individuals are often far more likely to contribute to the economy as wage earners and students if they're given the support they need at the critical junction of adolescence and adulthood.

It doesn't take much to push an at-risk youth in either direction, towards success or failure, but it's up to us to provide resources that steer them in the direction that builds a successful future.

In my riding of Newmarket–Aurora in York region, much is being done to help youth at risk, in particular for older youth who often find themselves in unique and difficult situations and end up on the streets. And 360°kids offers the youth of York region the opportunity to move from the streets into homeless shelters while providing counselling, positive mentorship and employment opportunities.

In fact, when I leave the chamber today, I'll be heading to Richmond Hill to spend a night on the street with the 360°kids Experience so that I can get a taste of what it's like to spend a night as a homeless youth. So 360°kids helps isolated and vulnerable children, youth and families in York region to overcome adversity and crisis and move from the streets to a safe and secure place to rest their head. But 360°kids recognizes that these youth need a wide range of support to help them rebuild their lives. Helping families work through the

tough times they face can go a long way in reducing a young person's dependence on future services.

As the minister stated, the Child and Family Services Act review is under way, and it's my belief that the review will result in changes that will address many of the issues we're discussing here today. Our government is dedicated, as I know all members of this House are, to ensuring we protect our youth to the absolute best of our ability.

I will also be supporting this bill and encourage all members of the House to do the same. I also, however, agree with the minister that more consideration needs to be taken in the approach of the proposed legislation to ensure it has the ability to do what it is designed to do.

I look forward to the opportunity to engage in discussions about how we can best shape this piece of legislation to maximize the benefits to the youth at risk in Ontario. These children are our future. They deserve our care and our protection. As I said, I'm quite delighted to support Bill 54, a bill moved by the Stormont–Dundas–South Glengary MPP previously in December 2014, because it is such an important piece of legislation.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to be able to offer a few remarks today on Bill 54. I, too, want to recognize that the genesis for this came from the former member for Barrie, his previous Bill 88, and I'm very happy that my colleague the member for Stormont–Dundas–South Glengary has reintroduced this bill that seeks to protect minors.

I want to tell you in a personal way my introduction to this gap, which is what we're talking about, the funding gap for children who have been in care. It was a few years ago that I received a phone call from a very, very agitated young man. He was so distraught in the conversation that it was difficult even to follow, but certainly his state of mind was clear, and that was that he had just discovered that, through a lack of knowledge, he had left care and that meant that he couldn't get back in. He had had very tumultuous early teenage years, and he had been in a particular foster home, which had provided him with the stability that, quite frankly, no one else ever had. So through a quirk of red tape, he found himself then on the outside. That was my introduction to the importance of this gap and, more importantly, finding the process by which to close it.

The notion that 16- and 17-year-olds are to be treated like adults—now, let me assure you, as the mother of a former 16- and 17-year-old, there were times when I thought it would be nice if she behaved like an adult. But in this context, it is a totally different issue. When you hear about human trafficking and you hear about people being put into prostitution and the evils that lurk, and then you are leaving the most vulnerable group of people at that particular age at loose ends without the protection of the law and the funding, it's quite shocking that in a civilized society we have been so late in addressing this particular issue.

I think that while there are agencies that exist, they are mostly trying to pick up the pieces. We should be proactive. That's what this bill tries to impress, that it is not appropriate to cast these people out into the community without support. It's my fervent hope, taking the words of the minister responsible for children and youth, that she will see the opportunity that this private member's bill provides to act as the impetus to actually do something for people who are in this circumstance.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

1600

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very happy to speak on this bill, an act to amend the Child and Family Services Act, which was brought forward by my colleague. My former colleague, former Barrie MPP Rod Jackson, is here. He should come and visit more often with his wife, Joanne, since we miss them dearly. He presented this bill as Bill 88. Unfortunately, we had the election last June, and we had to start all over again. Sometimes I think the public doesn't quite understand that there's so much repetition in government. Every time there's an election, the slate is wiped clean and we have to start over again, and it's very important that we get to work and get as much done as we can while we are here and able to address these issues.

As a former optometrist, I had a patient I recall very clearly who was 16 years old. She came in with her mother. She was having some problems in school, and it was suggested by somebody close to the family that maybe she needed to get her eyes checked. Well, the daughter was dressed very Goth: all in black, dyed black hair, sitting like this and scowling. Every time her mother spoke, she sort of grunted and grumbled and turned in her chair with her back to her mother. The tension in the room was palpable.

I sent her out after I checked her eyes. She did have a small prescription—she had worn glasses before—but that was not the issue. The issue was an incredibly angry teenager in a very dysfunctional situation where the mother didn't even recognize there was any issue. I sent her out with my assistant to look at frames, and she was actually very happy to go off and have her mother stay in the room for a short consultation with me. I acted as though that was the norm. It's definitely not the norm to hold a parent back and send a 16-year-old out to try on frames herself.

I sat the mother down and said, "You do realize there is a very tense situation here between you and your daughter?" And the mother said to me, "Well, that's teenagers." I said, "I have teenagers, I know lots of teenagers, I see lots of teenagers, and that is not a very healthy atmosphere that I'm sensing between the two of you. I suggest that you speak a guidance counsellor, speak to the family doctor. Maybe some family counselling is in order." The mother was a very pleasant woman, but she was brushing it all off.

I got a phone call from the police a couple of weeks later. The police called me and said they were calling me

because the child had disappeared. The police asked the parents if they had any inkling that she might disappear—that there were any problems—and the mother said to the police, "Well, we did see this optometrist a couple of weeks ago who said to me, 'This is a crisis situation, and you need to go for counselling. I'm worried that your daughter could hurt herself or run away, or something could happen.'" So they mentioned it to the police, and the police called me and asked me what I thought. I said, "I was just expressing concern. I have no idea where the daughter could have gone." It wasn't like she said to me, "I'm thinking of running away," and then I mentioned it to the mother.

I think the schools are dealing with this all the time. They're dealing with teenagers who are couch surfing; They're sleeping at their friends' houses; they're sleeping in cars; they're sleeping in garages. It's unfair to the entire school system that we're not addressing the fact that there are 16- and 17-year-olds who need support from all of us here, and who need support in the community. We have to find some way of dealing with this gap, as my colleague mentioned. Perhaps there's some kind of apprenticeship programs we can offer to these youth with some kind of co-mentoring, almost like foster parenting, because I can't see them being too happy in a regular foster home. More group homes are obviously needed, but that's not always the answer as well.

I'm glad I was able to share my story with you, Mr. Speaker. I think we all know people in the community who could use our support.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now return to the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. You have two minutes.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I want to thank the Minister of Children and Youth Services and the members from Oshawa, Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, Newmarket—Aurora, York—Simcoe and Thornhill for speaking today. I also want to thank the advocate for children and youth services, Irwin Elman, who was in today; and welcome my son, Bernie, who is here on his reading week from McGill University, who came in to see the bill today.

Currently, I just wanted to say that this is not the first step, as we're expecting the release of the review of the youth and family services act in the next few weeks. I believe submissions made to the ministry not only asked for the provisions of this bill to be incorporated into legislation, but the benefits for youths aged 16 and 17, who are new clients of the children's aid society—that they actually receive the same benefits as children who are first covered under the age of 16. I ask you: Why should a youth be excluded from the same benefits as someone, possibly a brother or a sister, just because they had the bad luck of turning 16 before something terrible happened to them, through no fault of their own?

I know that this bill went through committee before and there were some amendments. I would have expected it would have gone through, but I welcome the minister's comments that there may need to be some further amendments and that some of these extra services may

need to be included. We're certainly open for that and look forward to that, because it is a commitment. These youth are our future. We show that economically it's eight times more expensive to deal with them through the legal system than it would be to provide the care.

As well, as we have children that—there are more things to bring quickly. Children who are adopted at an older age lose their benefits. That's a deterrent to adoption. So there is some tweaking that needs to be done that we didn't include in this bill just because we wanted to get it through, but we would welcome those changes and we hope for successful passing of the bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

REGISTERED RETIREMENT SAVINGS PROTECTION ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION DES RÉGIMES ENREGISTRÉS D'ÉPARGNE EN VUE DE LA RETRAITE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 31, standing in the name of Mr. Rinaldi.

Mr. Rinaldi has moved second reading of Bill 70, An Act respecting protection for registered retirement savings.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is being referred to—

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Speaker, to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. Agreed? Agreed.

SAFE ROUNDABOUTS ACT, 2015 LOI DE 2015 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES CARREFOURS GIRATOIRES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Harris has moved second reading of Bill 65, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to provide rules for the use of roundabouts.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay." In my opinion, the ayes have it.

We will deal with the vote at the end of regular business.

RIGHT TO CARE ACT (CHILDREN 16 YEARS OF AGE AND OLDER), 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LE DROIT AUX SOINS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES ENFANTS DE 16 ANS ET PLUS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. McDonnell moved second reading of Bill 54, An Act to amend the Child and Family Services Act with respect to children 16 years of age and older.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is being referred to—

Mr. Jim McDonnell: The committee on social policy.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to social policy. Agreed? Agreed.

SAFE ROUNDABOUTS ACT, 2015 LOI DE 2015 SUR LA SÉCURITÉ DES CARREFOURS GIRATOIRES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1609 to 1614.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Can I ask all members to take their seats, please?

Mr. Harris has moved second reading of Bill 65, An Act to amend the Highway Traffic Act to provide rules for the use of roundabouts.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Anderson, Granville	French, Jennifer K.	Munro, Julia
Arnott, Ted	Hardeman, Ernie	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Baker, Yvan	Harris, Michael	Potts, Arthur
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoggarth, Ann	Qadri, Shafiq
Bisson, Gilles	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Chan, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Scott, Laurie
Clark, Steve	Malhi, Harinder	Sergio, Mario
Coteau, Michael	Mangat, Amrit	Singh, Jagmeet
Dhillon, Vic	Martins, Cristina	Tabuns, Peter
Dickson, Joe	Martow, Gila	Vanthof, John
Dong, Han	McDonnell, Jim	Walker, Bill
Duguid, Brad	Milczyn, Peter Z.	Zimmer, David
Fedeli, Victor	Moridi, Reza	

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please rise and remain standing.

Nays

Delaney, Bob	Murray, Glen R.
MacCharles, Tracy	Wong, Soo

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 38; the nays are 4.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the bill is being referred to—

Mr. Michael Harris: General government, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be referred to general government. Agreed? Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I beg to inform the House that pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Grant assumes ballot item number 36 and Mr. Dhillon assumes ballot item number 55.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

AGRICULTURE INSURANCE ACT (AMENDING THE CROP INSURANCE ACT, 1996), 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ASSURANCE AGRICOLE (MODIFIANT LA LOI DE 1996 SUR L'ASSURANCE-RÉCOLTE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 4, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 40, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur l'assurance-récolte (Ontario) et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, point of order: There isn't a member by the name of Mr. Grant in this House. Is it someone whose name should end in Crack?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I accept the member's point of order, and the record will be changed.

Mr. Steve Clark: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order, the member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm glad that Bill 40 is being debated. I have 21 members who haven't spoken to that bill, and I think I have five members here. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): When this item of business was last debated, the member for Elgin–Middlesex–London had completed his speech.

Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act. I support expanding and streamlining crop insurance programs and changing provincial purchasing policies so that Ontario produce is on the menu at schools and hospitals. This brings our

farmers in line with the rest of the country where farmers have long enjoyed this level of protection from their provincial governments.

As I start this, I just want to extend my appreciation to the farming community: the Bruce County Federation of Agriculture, the Grey County Federation of Agriculture, the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and all of the volunteers, board members, farmers and their families for producing the food that we all enjoy every day. I also want to give a quick shout-out to my great riding of Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound as the beef capital of Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to start today by talking about a little different area of agriculture, that being the apple industry. Last year was a tough year for apple growers when the early frost destroyed as much as 80% of their crop. I met with members of the Ontario Apple Growers who represent over 200 apple farmers—most of them are from the southern Georgian Bay area. Together with Meaford, the apple capital of Ontario, we represent one quarter of the province's total apple production.

I also toured the orchards to see first-hand some of the damage. Did you know that the farm gate value of our apple crop averages about \$60 million a year today? A few years back, this wasn't the case. In fact, apple trees were being bulldozed over and taken out of production in Ontario. I've been writing to the new full-time Minister of Agriculture to encourage him to invest in the productivity of this sector and seek an action plan to assist Ontario's apple growers to increase production and our export prospects by replacing the aging apple trees with the new varieties. Other provinces have done similar for their fruit growers, but no such revitalization program exists in Ontario. As the apple growers explained, it would take about \$25 million over seven years to totally revitalize our apple industry.

1620

Economic spinoffs: Jobs are the chief benefactors—growers; packing houses; government institutions like schools and hospitals, which can provide locally grown produce; and tourism.

We were disappointed with the last budget. There was \$40 million committed to food processing, but none to the fruit growers. Of course, it's great to see the processing industry get some funds to upgrade and do those types of things, but you need the fruit and the food to be there in order for it to be processed and to be as efficient as possible.

Apple farmers can be the ones to provide them with the raw materials they need. The apple growers are prepared to rejuvenate their \$60-million strong sector. Is the minister prepared to facilitate the development of Ontario's own revitalization plan and champion Ontario's apple industry?

There are a lot of local concerns, and one of the most common concerns I hear from farmers in Bruce and Grey, whether livestock, cattlemen, pork producers or cash crop farmers, is the government forms they have to fill out. Just how confusing or bureaucratic are they

going to be with this amendment? Those are the concerns, Mr. Speaker. I hear them every day from the people who work the land, work with our livestock. How much time do we have to put them through administrative and bureaucratic processes?

There are also concerns brewing over the government's Bill 66, the Great Lakes water protection bill. This bill supersedes all others, including the Nutrient Management Act. Anyone, including farmers, found to be in non-compliance will face a penalty anywhere from \$25,000 to \$100,000. How easy will it be for farmers to understand and comply with this new act? I hope the ag sector will have high representation on the government's Great Lakes Guardians' Council, the oversight body which will be appointed by this government.

Last time this bill was introduced—I'm surrounded by the Great Lakes in my wonderful riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound; of course I'm supportive of protecting our Great Lakes. It is our single most valuable asset: clean water for all of us to drink. But we need to do this with some sense and some balance, Mr. Speaker, and ensure that we're not having unintended consequences, particularly for people like our farmers and the industry that they support. Our farmers are great stewards of the land. Of all the people out there who want to protect and ensure our water supply, farmers are always there at the first step.

Some of them are still reeling over the clawback of overpayments under the risk management programs. It was a huge challenge. When I first got elected, I had farmers coming to me. One particular individual, who will remain unnamed, had an overpayment in excess of \$75,000, and that was a number of years after the money was given to him. They came along and said, "You have to pay it back," in a very short time frame. We went back and tried to work on behalf of this farmer. He was under the understanding that it wasn't a repayment, that it wasn't a loan. He had gone out and invested that money in various ways to help his farm increase productivity and capacity, to buy newer machinery, to ensure that he could provide jobs on his farm. All of a sudden, he had to come up with \$75,000 in very short order. He was only one among some 4,500 farmers who got the call from Agricorp to pay back the assistance money. None of the ones I spoke with had any idea that this money had to be paid back and certainly not many years afterwards. It was a complete nightmare. They had filed income tax for many years. The Canada Revenue Agency, of course, would have to go back and look at all those things. It was just a colossal nightmare to claw all this back.

In my current critic role, I have some concerns that this SAMS program is very similar. We're spending all kinds of time and energy, and we're going to have to continue to try to clean up a program that was rolled out with a lot of glitches and mistakes that are impacting our most vulnerable.

I have a question, Mr. Speaker: Why is this government trying to recover 100% of this money when its share was only 40%? The remaining 60% came from the

feds. They were clawing back 100% of dollars given even though they only really had a 40% stake in it. Again, the farmers could not understand the rationale for this. I tried at the time to speak to the minister about it and, sadly, I never ever did receive a straight answer.

I had substantial feedback from my constituents on the issue of dying bees. Bees, of course, play a critical role in our food production chain. Considering that the agriculture sector generates exports of over \$11 billion and contributes \$34 billion in gross domestic product for the province of Ontario while employing 760,000 Ontarians, it is important to keep our bees healthy. Our colleagues in this House have stood and spoken on this matter. We all believe that it should be science that we're following in regard to this, not knee-jerk reactions. Again, we are going to see the negative impacts of this knee-jerk legislation. I hope they will continue to work with all of the stakeholders and find a resolution to this.

Abattoirs are a huge, significant player—used to be a huge, significant player in ridings such as Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. Sadly, my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound has lost half of its abattoirs or butcher shops because of over-regulation. According to one published report, 15 years ago Ontario had more than 900 businesses to process meat and poultry. Today, there are about 130. We need more. We've almost decimated yet another industry because of this.

Kelven Arnold of Sullivan's Butcher Shop in Wiarton said he himself had to spend \$75,000 over three years just trying to comply with all of the regulations. In a very small shop, that's a lot of money to put a business that's trying to support the agricultural sector through, and the viability of his business was jeopardized. A hog farmer near Chatham said the average costs for a small plant to meet all the new standards is \$165,000 and up to 75% funding is needed in order for small owners to meet regulatory changes.

The adverse impact on promoting local food is when you take people like our local abattoirs, our local food processors, our local butcher shops out of the mix and put them out of business. This has a really negative ripple effect to our agricultural community. What is the minister going to do, I ask, to reverse this negative trend?

I continually hear from our agricultural community that the rising cost of energy, the costliest rates in North America today—we used to be the leader with the lowest rates; now we have the highest rates in North America—are one of the biggest concerns in the cost of running a farm today. When that cost is skyrocketing, as it is in Ontario—Ontario has the highest, as I've said, electricity rates compared to all other North American jurisdictions—it just pushes the food costs to all of us up. If there's more hydro being consumed at a higher rate, the cost of food is obviously going to have to pick up some of that slack.

Every rural member has heard from farmers in their riding about the mounting energy bills and those exorbitant adjustment fees. One farmer was paying \$4,000 for global adjustment fees. Another was paying \$1,500 a

month at his 32-head dairy farm, even though his barns weren't heated. It's simply not sustainable.

I also hear this from people off the farm. The cost of hydro is challenging our seniors, those on fixed incomes and particularly those who are most vulnerable in our society. We have to take a look at energy, regardless of what we're looking to do in the future.

To my understanding, other provinces in Canada have designated electricity rates for farms, and Ontario yet again is lagging. Again, I ask that minister, what are you prepared to do to fix this injustice? Unaffordable energy costs are also the single largest threat to food production. We need only remember the fate of Heinz and Kellogg's, both shuttered.

Farmers have waited 11 years for movement on plans for production insurance to expand to other commodities. They finally got it; that and two months of hearings on Bill 40. Where did this bill travel in January and February?

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind the minister that your colleague and MPP for Leeds–Grenville wanted to know if Kemptville was one of the stops for these hearings on Bill 40. We want to remind the House that this government tried to shutter Kemptville campus, one of the oldest institutions to offer an agricultural education in Ontario.

While I applaud that they're moving forward on some of these, there's still lots in the agricultural sector that we need to do. We need to be listening to the stakeholders in our farm communities. Let's not forget where our food comes from: from our farmers, from the great agricultural industry that we've always had. Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound has always been a proud agricultural community and always will be. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to speak on behalf of the NDP caucus and the residents of Timiskaming–Cochrane and, today, on behalf of many of my people in the farming community.

This bill is pretty simple. We're changing the Crop Insurance Act to the Agriculture Insurance Act. We're in favour, but we've heard from several that this is going to help farmers this spring. That's not true.

This changes the enabling legislation to allow more crops and more agricultural products to be insured. But the way the current act works, the farmers pay 40%, the province pays 26% and the feds pay 34%. This act doesn't have any money attached to it. So if it has no money attached to it at the farm level, with this act nothing is going to change—absolutely nothing. There has to come a lot more meat to the bones before it actually impacts the farming community.

1630

Is this a good piece of legislation? Yes. But it's only a start. The sad part about this piece of legislation is that it could have been done in 2003, when it was actually passed at the federal-provincial agricultural meeting. What year are we in now? 2015. This government has

been in place for 10, 12 years. They are moving at lightning speed for the agricultural community, lightning speed: over 10 years to actually come up to somewhat the same level as the other provinces, and yet there is still no money attached.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Helena Jacek: I'm very pleased to rise in support of Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act, 2014. Overall, I'm hearing support for this bill, and I'd like to move with some lightning speed at this point.

The bill has now been debated for over nine hours. The government extended debate beyond the 6.5-hour threshold so that more members would have an opportunity to speak to the bill. Listening to the debate, it has been clear that the majority of members are in support of this bill. I know I am.

My riding comprises a very large part in the greenbelt. I have many, many farms. I have some exceptionally successful agribusinesses, like Ontario Lamb and King Cole Ducks. In fact, Ontario Lamb won an agribusiness award from the Premier a couple of years ago.

This type of production insurance, going beyond crops and perennial plants, is something that I think will be a great benefit to business in my riding. I think it really is an opportunity here to move forward.

We've got some very important bills on the agenda. I'd like to move forward with things like Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act; Bill 37, the Invasive Species Act; Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act, a very important one; Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act; and Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act.

I would really like, at this point, to urge all members to have their say but move this forward with the kind of speed that I think is due to our businesses and our farmers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise and speak, and commend my friend from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for a very good presentation on the bill. Thank goodness he could find other things to talk about, because you couldn't possibly make that good a speech on what is in this bill.

As was mentioned to my good friend in the NDP, there is really nothing in this bill, except that it changes the title or name of one of the agencies within the government, Agricorp, and it gives the minister the power to add—it's actually "agricultural crops" in the present legislation and they have changed it to "agricultural products" so we can include more items in the bill. If the minister so wishes, he could add beef cattle to the insurance program. That's what it is, as was mentioned.

The farmer buys insurance to cover the eventuality that if something happens and they can't make money on it, then the cost of the disaster is covered by insurance through this program.

Again, as I said earlier, I support the bill because what it does, it does right, but it does very little.

I was just looking here. We did a survey, and I would think that the minister, instead of working and spending all this time on this, might have wanted to look at the survey and see what the agriculture community said he really should be doing, as opposed to writing bills like this.

One is, "How big is the impact of increased hydro costs on your farm?" Some 60.7% said it was a significant impact.

Drought: "What impact has drought had on your farm?" For 62.1%, it had a significant impact. Yet there is nothing in this program, as was mentioned earlier, no assistance and help for these farmers who are seeing these kinds of increases and these kinds of problems.

I think—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to get a chance in the next rotation to have 10 minutes on this bill—my God, can you imagine? What am I going to do with those 10 minutes?

I just want to say this, because I feel something coming on on the other side, on the government side, and I don't think it's a feeling of love; I think it's a feeling of calling the question is where these guys are going.

I've just got to say to the government across the way, this place works well when the government House leader works along with the opposition House leaders in order to be able to try to deal with what it is the opposition needs. Are there amendments to particular legislation? Are there private members' bills that we want to be able to move forward, not just at second reading, but actually to be able to bring them into the House to third reading? If you do those kinds of things, this place actually works fairly well.

I'd just say to members, I came to this place, along with a few others, and when I came to this place there was no such thing as time allocation. The only thing you could do to close debate was to call the question, and the threshold for calling the question—as my good friend from whatever riding, Mr. Kwinter, knows—was quite high.

But what would happen at that time is that the government House leader, whoever it was, would work with the opposition House leaders and there would be some very serious and very political and very pointed debates on legislation that the opposition was opposed to, and on a whole bunch of other bills, those bills just sailed along fairly easily. I will argue that there was hardly a debate at third reading because, in fact, you had come to an agreement during the process at second reading, at House leaders', about how to deal with the bill and to do proper committee hearings when it came to travelling the bill and giving the public the chance to have their say, and also for clause-by-clause in order to make amendments.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: So I understand that new members coming into this place feel frustrated because they never lived in the old system, but I would argue that the old system was far more productive when it came to moving legislation forward and for making the kind of changes that strengthen legislation than what we have now.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I return to the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound. You have two minutes.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to point out that in the gallery we have Bernie McDonnell, the son of Jim, from Stormont—Dundas—Glengarry. They're a long-standing farm family and I know that they are enjoying this debate today about agriculture.

I'd like to thank my colleague from Timiskaming—Cochrane. I think he brought up some good points—no money, where is this really going, and how long has this taken to get done? They've been in government for 12 years. If they really were sincere, it would have been in place.

To the Minister of Community and Social Services, thank you very much. I hope there's some lightning speed and that we actually get things done around here, because this record is pretty abysmal at the best of times.

Ernie Hardeman from Oxford, my well-renowned colleague, ran out of time because he has such a wealth of knowledge on the agricultural file, a former Minister of Agriculture. I wish the current minister would spend more time listening to our former Minister of Ag because he has a lot that he brings to the table. He knows what the realities of being on a farm are. He's a practical guy who has practical experience to bring to the table.

I think he brought a good point in: that, again, this could be extended to beef, cattle and sheep farmers, because a lot of those in areas like ours—particularly with coyote kills, they lose that asset and they get very little compensation, if any, at most times. This would certainly give them a level playing field, and I think that's very important.

He touched on the issue that 60.7% of farmers are concerned about the increasing costs of hydro. It is one of those things, not just to farmers but to everybody, but particularly to our agricultural industry, because, as I say, the price of food goes up every time that energy file is increased.

To the member for Timmins—James Bay, I think he brings a good point, that in this House we need to ensure that every member has the ability to speak and to represent democracy, which is the fundamental premise of us all being here. Particularly in something like agriculture, we need to ensure that our constituents are being heard. They give us the information to bring to this House to share and ensure that as a fundamental democracy, their voice is heard, and we shouldn't be shutting it down.

We'll be supporting this. I think there are lots of questions. There are amendments needed, but I think that generally we will move forward and try to support it the best we can.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, in the short 10 minutes that I have, let me just start with the shout-out by the parliamentary assistant across the way, which was to call me a piece of work for having raised the issue of how legislation used to work in this place.

I just want to say, in all fairness to the other side, I understand new members coming into this place and feeling frustrated, because when you're elected into a majority government—and I was there and my other friends were here before—you really do feel, “We’ve got a majority and we can do what we’ve got to do and move the government’s agenda forward.” I get all of that, but I was trying to make the point that we never had time allocation when I came here. When Monte came here, there was no time allocation. And guess what used to happen? Bills, more times than not, actually didn’t stay very long at second reading, because you would make a deal on those bills that you cared less about to talk more on the bills you did care about.

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But the really good thing was that the public really were the benefactors, because bills used to go to committee. Those bills that were contentious or weighty went to committee, and there was an actual time when members would sit for longer periods of time, travelling the bill through this province and having time here at Queen’s Park at committee level, working together to try to figure out how to strengthen the bill.

I just make this point—and Speaker, I just ask for a little bit of latitude, because it’s related to this particular bill. You’ll remember the sustainable forestry development act. Just like the parliamentary assistant across the way, I was a brand-new member. I just got here. I got the God-inherited right as a New Democrat to pass every bill, because after all, we got the majority. I remember that feeling. But what happened was another new member, Chris Hodgson—I don’t remember his riding; I think Victoria–Haliburton was his riding—was the MNR critic in the Conservative caucus. I can’t remember who it was for the Liberals; I think it was David Ramsay. We had a bill to change the way that we deal with stumpage in the province of Ontario and how we deal with forestry management practices.

We thought we had all the answers because we had done all of the consultation stuff we had to do. You know what? Mr. Ramsay from the Liberal Party and Mr. Hodgson from the Conservative Party went to these committee hearings with us. They would get people to speak on issues that they were interested in, other people would come in, and they actually made proposals that made sense. So we changed our bill greatly as a result of the input by the members from the opposition and we made a stronger bill that lasted some 15 years after the date. It’s still the model when it comes to managing our forests in the province of Ontario. The forest management planning process we have comes out of that experience. We made it better, we made it stronger, and we

made it easier for companies to work with, and better for the environment, by having members engage.

The problem you have in the mechanism you’ve got now is that members go to committee and say, “I’ll never win an amendment. I’ll never be able to advance anything because, in the end, the government’s not going to listen. What’s in it for us?” The system doesn’t work well when it does that.

I’ll tell you the other thing it does. It makes this Legislature much more partisan. This Legislature was far less partisan than it is now under the old rules of no time allocation. It was much, much less partisan. Why? Because members by—

Hon. Dipika Damerla: You wonder why this place is so partisan—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order, please.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Never mind. I give up. You guys know it all.

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Jeez, Mr. Speaker, I’m trying to be respectful; I’m not trying to accuse members on the other side. When I say this House was partisan, I’m not talking at one side of the House.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, jeez, do I have to explain that this House is a collective House? It’s not just about the government or the opposition. So understand I’m not attacking—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, but it’s frustrating. I can take heckling. I’ve been around here for a long time; I can dish it out and I can take it. But when members don’t seem to understand what the basic tenet of a Legislature is supposed to be about, it’s frustrating.

My point was, we have made this Legislature more partisan—by virtue of eliminating time allocation—and I would invite all of you to read some O’Brien and Bosc and speak to our Clerks. They’ve been around here for a long time. I think they bear out what it is that I’m saying.

I think this place works better when we have less partisanship. I give you as an example our select committees, where we did the mental health reform—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would say to the member, you asked me for some latitude. It’s been almost five minutes. I would ask you to speak to the bill.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Farming, agriculture.

I’m just going to finish on this point: It’s less partisan. I say to the members across the way, the government at one point—whoever’s on the other side; I don’t care who it is—has to get this through their minds with regards to changing the way we do things here, because what we’re doing now I don’t think is the best way of doing it.

To the bill we have before us today—and I want, Speaker, to thank you, because you did give me lots of latitude. I get it. I just want to say this: We all had the opportunity about two days ago, I believe, to go see the grape growers. I knew that the grape industry had a

problem because of the cold we've had this year. Especially those in the Niagara area are going to be losing—it looks like a potential to lose a lot of their crop. This bill could be something that will be very helpful for the grape industry. Because of the cold being as cold as it was as long as it has been, those people, especially in the Niagara area, have a potential of losing a large percentage of not just their buds on the vines, but also losing the plant itself, because the temperature has been so cold for so long there's going to be a negative effect to the plant. This particular legislation could help that particular industry.

But as members in the Conservative caucus have pointed out, and certainly our agricultural critic has pointed out, unless the government gives an appropriation of dollars to this, it's essentially a nice piece of paper that's going to basically make you feel good, and maybe you can use it to warm up the plant by setting it on fire—and hopefully not burning your plant down—so the darn thing don't freeze this winter. But unless you tie money to the bill during the appropriation process of our budget, this thing is not going to do much good.

As the member from Timiskaming-Cochrane pointed out, this has been around since 2003. The ministers at the federal and provincial levels came to an agreement about having to extend the coverage of various parts of the agricultural industry when it comes to crop insurance, because the ministers of the day at the provincial and federal levels recognized that what we had for crop insurance was somewhat restricted, and there were far more people in the farm community who needed to have that type of assurance to be able to make the kinds of investments they've got to make to be in the agricultural business.

It is not like it was 50 years ago. Investing in a farm today, you're talking in the millions of dollars. So when a young couple decides that they want to buy dad's farm, or the neighbours' farm, and have to invest \$1 million or \$2 million or \$3 million to take over the dairy farm or whatever it is—well, a dairy farm might be a little bit different, but let's say cash crops and others—there is a real problem trying to raise the money at the bank to be able to secure the loan. They'll take the land, but it's pretty hard to use the crop as a way of being able to lever dollars from the bank. Proper crop insurance, I think, goes a long way to be able to assist some of those people in the agricultural business who are trying to secure loans in order to be able to buy that first farm. So I think a lot of good can come out of this legislation, and that's why we, as New Democrats—and I'm certain by this point the Conservatives and Liberals—are going to vote for this bill.

But you're going to have to make the appropriation through the budget process to make this work. The fact that the government has waited some 12 years to bring the legislation in at the time where they had the ability to do this 13 years ago, tells me that they never wanted to make the appropriation. That's really the story here. Though they wanted to be able to say, "We like farmers;

we want to do everything to give them a hug and make them feel good," they weren't doing what needed to be done, which is the appropriation. They rightly understood that if they brought the bill, there had to be an appropriation. So let's hope that with this bill coming forward there's an intention with the government to actually make the appropriation in the budget. I'm not convinced. I know there are a number of members in this House who aren't convinced, but clearly that would be something that would be good.

Again, I just encourage members, if you have an opportunity to speak to people in our grape industry, it's rather scary what they're going through, because if the plant has been affected and the plant dies, you're talking about five to six years before they're in a position to go back into production again. For a number of people in the wine industry, that's the difference between being able to stay in business and having to leave, because you can't afford to have five or six years without a crop to recoup some of the money that you're going to need in order to be able to do the work that does need to happen to get your crop up and running and do what it is that you've got to do in the preparation of wine.

So I just say to the members across the way, if you have a chance, talk to the people in the vintner business—not the vintner business but people on the agricultural side of the wine business—and I'll tell you, it is a pretty scary thing. Let's hope that things are not as bad as what seems to be the case, but certainly I think there are going to be some issues in the future.

With that, Mr. Speaker, again, merci beaucoup de m'avoir donné la latitude que j'ai demandée. Vous me l'avez donnée et je vous remercie.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 40 and to respond to comments made by the member from Timmins-James Bay.

I just want to begin by saying that if the member opposite was truly interested in making this House less partisan, as a House leader, he might make the decision to stop stalling this bill. This bill has now had nine hours of debate—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Over half of the members of the Legislature have either spoken to this bill or participated in the debate.

I heard him speak, and he had very little to say on the bill. He went on and on about many other issues, but didn't speak to the bill, because everything that needed to be said has been said.

If you're truly, truly concerned about the welfare of Ontarians and you truly want to make this House work, let's start by leading by example.

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One way you can do that is that we have extended debate beyond the six-and-a-half-hour threshold. We're at 9 hours. If the member truly meant what he said about

making this Legislature work collectively and raising the tenor of this House, then let him start by example. Let us start moving forward. I'm calling on the opposition parties to stop stalling on this bill and help us move forward. Help us move this important piece of legislation forward so we can continue to debate other important bills like Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act; Bill 37, the Invasive Species Act; Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act; Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act; Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act.

I think it was Mahatma Gandhi who said, "Be the change that you want to see." Perhaps the member opposite could take inspiration from that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise and commend the member from Timmins-James Bay for his presentation on this agriculture bill.

As I have said in previous remarks, it's a four- or five-page bill, but there are only two operative clauses in it: One is that we change the name of the insurance program to cover all products in agriculture, as opposed to just growing crops; and the other is to give the minister authority, by regulation, to set those items that could be insured that are presently not insurable. Those two items and the change in the name of the bill, I—and we—wholeheartedly support. What we don't support is the government looking at a bill like that doing so little when all these other things that do need doing aren't getting done.

I mentioned earlier the survey we did. I just want to go through some of the comments that were made in the survey. A question on the survey was, "What are the biggest challenges facing your farming operation?" "High taxes" and "growing fuel costs," from an Ontario goat and vegetable farmer; "hydro," from a southwestern Ontario cattle and grain farmer. "Red tape, plain and simple, detracts focus from job at hand, and I'm always worried someone from some other ministry will show up unexpectedly, use all my time for that day, and probably many others, responding, complying with the same whimsical findings, and cost me yet more money," from a southwestern Ontario nursery and horticultural farmer; "high input costs, more red tape," from a Golden Horseshoe farmer; "too much government regulation, increasing costs for feed and hydro." I like this one, Mr. Speaker: "OMAF's idiotic drainage program."

You would think there would be room in this legislation to deal with some of the issues that need to be dealt with to help our farming community—but nothing. All it does is change the name of an organization and give the minister more authority, but it doesn't do anything for the farmers of our province.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to speak about agriculture. I'd like to respond to the response from the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

that nine hours are enough time to debate this bill. This bill is one of the foundational pieces of a \$34-billion industry that creates 750,000 jobs. If it takes 10 or 11 hours to make sure that everybody's opinion gets on, I think that would be worthwhile.

This bill is a good bill; nobody's arguing the bill. What we're trying to get across is that what is important is what comes after the bill. We don't know how that's going to work, because it might never come back to this Legislature; it will just be the minister who changes the regulations. That's a problem.

The issue here is that we are going to expand the amount of agricultural products that can be insured—great. But there's no way we know where the money is going to come from to pay for the 26% from the province. If there's no new money, they could very well take it away from the risk management program we have. They'll take it from that and put it in this pot, and it will be a net loss for agriculture.

That's why we're trying to put these points on the floor, and we don't hear any answers about that. In these nine hours of debate, we have yet to hear one answer about that.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Ask in question period. Why don't you use question period?

Mr. John Vanthof: The member across is complaining about question period. Quite frankly, it's our job to hold the government to account. If the government actually answered the questions in question period, we would move a lot farther ahead.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I just want to address my comments to the member for Timmins-James Bay. I appreciate your comments about the way it used to be, but now we have an opportunity to move it to the next stage.

We've extended the debate now for over nine hours. Over half the members of the Legislature have either spoken to this bill or participated in the debate during questions and comments. The government extended the debate beyond the six-and-a-half-hour threshold so more members would have an opportunity to speak to the bill.

Listening to the debate, it seems clear that the majority of members are in support of this bill. This signals that there's no true desire to have further meaningful debate on this bill, and their only goal is delay. I'm calling on the opposition parties to stop stalling and help us move forward this important piece of legislation so we can continue to debate other important bills like Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act; Bill 37, the Invasive Species Act; Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act; Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act; Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act—

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Bill 66—

Mr. Monte Kwinter: And Bill 66.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I appreciate the comments of all of the members. I'll just say this: Back in the day before

time allocation, we actually passed more bills than we do now. That's the truth. Go back and take a look at the order paper for everything dating back from 1993, and you will see that the Legislature passed more bills and enacted more laws under the old rules when we had no time allocation because the parties were forced to work together. Mr. Arnott down the way there was here with me in 1990. We actually passed more bills.

I hear the members across the way say, "Oh, if we didn't talk about this bill, we'd get this bill, we'd get that bill, we'd get this one, and maybe we'd get that one too." I'm sorry, but we actually passed more bills. For example, there was hardly a bill that had any debate at third reading. Ted, do you remember any? I don't hardly remember a bill at third reading—we used to have Committee of the Whole.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: What year was this?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: This was before 1993.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Who did that in 1993?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Listen, I've taken the blame for that a long time ago; just don't worry about it.

We used to actually have time in this House to do Committee of the Whole. There are only about five of us as members who've seen Committee of the Whole because we haven't seen it—maybe a little bit more than that—since about the late 1990s. The point was, the House had enough time to do Committee of the Whole back in those days.

I just say to the members across the way: The argument that, "If everybody didn't talk, we could pass more legislation and we'd be more efficient"—I reject that argument. The way that this place is supposed to work is that members are supposed to find ways of working together, having the real fights on the bills that we're diametrically opposed to and agreeing on some of the bills that we're fine with. That's the trade-off.

I remember what those meetings were like. You'd go in and you'd say, "Here are 10 bills that we are okay with, that we're all right to pass." Those bills got very little debate. Government passed them through the process. Sometimes they got lots of committee; sometimes they didn't. The rest of the time, we'd spend our time on two or three bills that were major signatory bills, like a budget.

I just say to the government across the way: Your argument doesn't hold water, according to the history of this place.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I was just giving some time for the government side, if they chose, to participate in an agriculture debate. We never really get enough time to speak about agriculture in this Legislature. I just wanted to point that out.

Today we're debating Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act. It basically amends the Crop Insurance Act to expand the scope of the act, which is going to expand the bill so it applies to all agriculture products that are designated by the minister by regulation. There are a lot

of technical pieces, basically changing names, in the act. We're supportive of the general direction of the act. We'd like to see that. We have a lot of things to discuss in agriculture.

1700

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Tell us what they are.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Okay. The member from Northumberland says, "Tell us what they are." I have nine minutes, so no problem. Sit back in your chair and rest. There you go.

My colleague the member from Oxford, who was our agriculture critic and was Minister of Agriculture before, brought up a lot of points from the survey he did. He actually went to the farmers and consulted them—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member from Northumberland—Quinte West, come to order.

Ms. Laurie Scott: —asked farmers in Northumberland—right there. Of course we have red tape—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I would ask the member to speak through the Speaker instead of the dialogue that's going on across the floor.

Ms. Laurie Scott: No offence to the member from Northumberland, but that's not a problem. I will speak directly to the Speaker.

We heard from the farmers on many, many issues—a lot more could be mentioned in agriculture bills here because of the changes they had mentioned they'd like to see.

Red tape: Have we not heard enough about red tape? When are you guys going to get it over there on the government side and actually do something about it? Farmers have been frustrated, and continue to be frustrated, for a long, long time. "Burnt out by excessive government regulations, confusing forms and bad customer service"—these are quotes from the survey that the member from Oxford conducted in the agriculture community.

Even the CFIB conducted a survey: 63% of farmers say their businesses have been "impacted by delays caused from red tape." "One third of agribusiness owners would not advise their children to start a business given the burden of government red tape."

You have to listen to these. It is true out there, and I hear it in my riding among my farm community constantly. "A farmer doesn't have time to sit on the phone waiting for government to answer questions or fill out piles of confusing paperwork in the middle of calving." "To add insult to injury, many farmers feel the red tape burden is getting worse." They felt it's gotten worse, no question. "Working with the programs is frustrating, which discourages farmers from participating." No question.

We mentioned hydro. There are some dairy farmers who are actually members of the Legislature here. They might have retired from dairy farming—but you have to milk the cows twice a day and some of it's in peak time. You just can't avoid it. Their costs for hydro have gone up insurmountably.

So, when we do agriculture bills, we'd like more topics discussed. We do agree with increasing what agriculture insurance does expand to, but there are many questions surrounding Bill 40. Will it be easy for farmers to forecast the amount and timing of payments? Can the payments be processed rapidly to get them into the hands of farmers quickly? Will program calculations be clear and transparent? Will each participant get a detailed statement, like an income tax form that we receive back?

The bill is not clear on who the program is being expanded to cover. Is it bees? Is it pork? You wanted me to discuss the bill, over there in the government, so I'm asking the questions that we find in the bill. It doesn't tell us what the rules will be for them. It doesn't tell us where the money is coming from, or if there will be money.

The government promised farmers a reliable, bankable, predictable risk management program. Then, a year later, after implementing that, they implemented a cap, which means it's no longer bankable. Now we are being asked to trust that same government over there when they put a piece of legislation in front of us, like this bill here today, Bill 40, that contains no program details.

The government tells us that there is no money to help out our farmers. If they were capping programs because they were putting every dollar into paying down the debt, I think farmers would respect that. But the truth is that when the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs had money left at the end of 2013, they gave over \$11 million of it out to hand-picked companies. There was no public announcement that the money was available. In fact, there wasn't even a publicly available application. Staff at OMAFRA just selected a certain group of companies and invited them to apply. The first time their competitors heard about the funds was when the government held a photo op actually announcing the grants, and I think some of the members in the government remember that. This year-end money included a \$1-million grant to a distillery even though the project wouldn't create a single new job. Is that very good use of taxpayer monies? I don't think so. It included a grant to a company that had almost finished building their factory, and according to the reports, they didn't even ask for the money—nice for them, not responsible government.

Now the same government is putting forward this legislation that allows them to modify and expand programs by regulation and expecting that we're just going to trust that they're going to do it all properly and with the farmers' interests in mind. So that brings us back to more of the discussion from what the survey said.

We have abattoirs that are struggling—if they've even remained open—and continue to struggle. They've got provincial versus federal for lambs and goats. That's from an eastern Ontario goat and sheep farmer. They've got, "Why aren't you ensuring the viability of small meat processors? Stop having a one-size-fits-all approach to food safety and move to a risk-based approach." That was from a pork farmer.

I don't know if I said it, but I will mention it again: 77.2% of farmers said the amount of red tape on Ontario

farms is increasing. I just want to make sure you got that point; I wanted to bring it up a couple of times. Then 60.7% of farmers said the impact of hydro costs has been significant. Again, we've mentioned that a few times; we're just trying to get the message through to you over there that we've got a community that's crying to be consulted.

What's going on right now? The Ontario Federation of Agriculture: They've got the neonicotinoids. They said, "The use of neonicotinoid seed treatments"—this is from the OFA, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture—"has been isolated as the focus of compromised pollinator health. The current process outlined in the discussion paper to dramatically lower levels of treated seed acreage is not evidence-based and therefore flies in the face of the government's own Open for Business consultation process."

The Ontario beekeepers said, "OFA is prepared to work with industry and government to achieve a practical and workable pollinator health strategy. Extensive research suggests there are at least nine stressors affecting pollinator health and we clearly identified these in our response, suggesting the government address all health factors as part of a comprehensive pollinator health strategy."

They're saying, "We want to work with the government. Don't just do things without consulting us—and get it right on the science. Don't shut down an industry." You have to balance what's going on.

I understand and I respect the fact that most of the members on the government side are from urban areas.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: Not me.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I know, not all. I said "most" are.

We represent predominantly rural areas. We're here; use us as information education sections, to the government, Mr. Speaker. We're here to offer advice to—I mentioned quite a few organizations that give good advice. I just want to get it on the record that they want their message heard by the government.

I think what's really sad about young farmers who struggle to get in—the survey mentioned quite a few times that it's very hard for young farmers to get in. It's even harder when their parents, who are in farming, tell them not to get into it. They say something like three out of five farmers wouldn't have gone into the business if they had known about the red tape and paperwork. That doesn't encourage them to tell their children, "Let us help you get into the business."

We all want to buy local food. We want to help our farmers—on this side, anyway. So we were shocked about the proposed closures of Alfred and Kemptville Colleges. I know that our member from Oxford wrote a letter to the Premier about it right away. The member from Leeds–Grenville has fought tirelessly to keep the agriculture courses in Kemptville College, because we want those young people. We've discussed the need for young people in the agribusiness sector.

We have the auto sector and the agribusiness sector. You can talk to two different sets of people about who

employs the most number of people in Ontario, but they are the top 1 and 2.

We need to do more for our farmers so we support Bill 40, but we would like to talk about more agriculture issues and make changes to help the farmers.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: First of all, I want to commend the member on her 10 minutes. That was very informative.

One of the points that I want to build on is the fact that we don't have a lot of discussion in this House about agriculture, and I think we need to do that more often. In fact, my colleague mentioned the point that the importance of our farmers can't be highlighted enough, can't be emphasized enough.

I want to share a personal story about farming. Both of my parents come from farming traditions. They were both long-time farmers back home. There are significant barriers for farmers; there are significant difficulties that farmers face.

1710

In a vibrant society, one of the things that we need to talk about is this concept of food security. Your independence, as a nation or as a province, often flows from the fact that you have food security, that your space, your community—wherever you live, whether it's a city, a province or a country, if your country, your community, your space can provide food for its inhabitants, its citizens, its residents, it makes you more secure and it makes you more independent.

Sometimes we don't really think about the importance of farmers on that level. Having the ability to feed our communities is something of vital importance. Having the fundamentals, like water, food and shelter: Those are the three things that we need absolutely, and everything else is on top of that. Even if we talk about poverty reduction, essentially the first step of addressing people's conditions is finding them a place to live, and then once we find them a place to live, they need to have food and shelter. If we can't provide food on our own in our own communities, in the places we live, we're losing some of our independence, we're losing some of our sovereignty in a way, and we're losing some of our security. It's something that's vitally important.

My family went through a lot of difficulties when the government made policies that made it harder to be a farmer. If policies are made that encourage farming, that make it easier to be a farmer, that support them, then we'll have more farmers, we'll have more independence, we'll have more food security. So it's something we need to look at. There's a direct connection between the policies that governments implement and the ease in which it is for farmers to operate, for them to get into the work of being a farmer.

My colleague from the Progressive Conservative Party mentioned how difficult it is for young people to get into farming, and it is very difficult. If we want this industry and we want this tradition to grow and to continue, we

need to make sure young people are encouraged to enter into it. We have to do that by making policies that make it easier to enter into farming.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Joe Dickson: Thank you to the previous speakers.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Another rural member, a great rural member.

Mr. Joe Dickson: A great rural member? Thank you very much—from a city boy.

Mr. Arthur Potts: You're welcome. We love having you on board.

Mr. Joe Dickson: From a city boy.

I'd like to just make a couple of comments, if I could, and I know sitting across the floor—I can't mention names, so I won't say Mr. Hardeman, an expert on agriculture, will turn around and listen like all of the other members over there.

I just want to mention that the opposition parties are really extending this, whether needlessly or not. It's a debate on Bill 40, and we should perk it up. Let's move it on. It's now sitting on 10 hours. That's a pretty good indicator that we should be well on our way to the next bill, so we can produce more work, get more work done and do a better job quicker and more productively for the residents of Ontario.

Over half the members of this Legislature have spoken to this bill—and then most of the other half have also spoken as well on it. I think there are some members here who have spoken on it two times. I know the member from Ajax-Pickering has, and he's enjoyed both occasions.

This government has extended the debate past the 6.5 hours threshold so we would have an opportunity to speak to the bill. The signals are there. We have a desire to get on with it, and I think—because I've listened to the members and there has been productive comment from all parties—it's time to complete this process. Let's rectify this. Let's approve it. Let's move it to committee for consideration. There is a lot of time that we can spend on it there. I'd like to see all parties involved in that. I know both the NDP and Ms. Scott have done a great job. All of my farm background is—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Mr. Joe Dickson: —particularly around Lindsay—thank you—and—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much. Questions and comments?

The member for Wellington-Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to commend my colleague—

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I think he's finished.

I want to commend my colleague the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock for her presentation this afternoon on Bill 40.

I've heard a number of the government members in their two-minute hits this afternoon start talking about, it's time to move on with this bill and move it forward. In the past, in recent days, that has foreshadowed a closure motion from the government side. Of course, that puts the Speaker in the difficult position of deciding whether or not enough debate has taken place and whether or not to allow the motion to proceed or whether to ask for further debate.

I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, when there is a significant number of members of the Legislature who haven't had a chance to speak to the bill—and I'm not talking about two-minute hits. I'm talking about debating the substance of the bill with either a 20-minute or a 10-minute slot, especially on an issue such as agriculture, which is vitally important to the entire province. The fact is, we very rarely debate agriculture issues in the Legislature. This government hasn't seen fit to bring forward very much in the way of agriculture legislation.

Allowing a fulsome debate on this particular issue would show a measure of respect for our farm communities and our agribusinesses and our farm families. I think we owe it to our farm families to allow a fulsome debate on this issue because it involves agriculture. I would suggest and submit to the government and implore them, really, not to move closure on this bill until every member who wants to have an opportunity to speak to it has been given that opportunity. It is so vitally important to the province and certainly to members of the Legislature from our side. The vast majority of our members come from small-town and rural Ontario, and we all have an interest in agriculture. We would all want to have the opportunity to participate fully in legislative debates on this issue, like Bill 40.

Again, I want to congratulate the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock for her presentation. We look forward to further debate on Bill 40.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I very much fear you're not going to get a lot of debate. I think at one point they're going to pull the trigger on closure, calling the question.

Anyway, I just want to say again: Congratulations to the member for her—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Did I hear something? Sorry; it was one of those things, right?

Anyway, I was just saying that members make some good points. I think what the opposition is saying to the government is that the bill, in itself, is not a bad thing, but really, there are a couple of things that we need to do.

Probably the most important one: There needs to be an appropriation of dollars tied to this bill. If you don't appropriate the dollars, what it means to say is that technically, you can be in a spot where there are more people coming to the pool in order to try to recoup losses they would have had as the result of whatever happened that year, and there would be less money to go around. It's one of the bills where the government can do some

really good press releases and say, "Look what we're doing. We're going to help the agricultural industry."

On the surface, it's a good bill, and there's probably no argument that it's going to help the agricultural industry by title, but you can't bank a title. You can't go to the bank and say—well, you can bank a title if you own the land; that's a whole other issue. But my point is, you can't bank the money because of the title of the bill; there has to be money tied to it. I think one of the things the opposition is saying is: The government has to put in place, in their appropriations in the budget this year, the money for that. The reason that we're a little bit doubtful is that the government has had some 13 years to do this and they haven't. Why, all of a sudden, is it being done now? Is it because the government has finally decided they're going to appropriate the dollars? It seems to me that if that was the case, the government would have announced it in their budget this year and would have said, "And we're going to be introducing the bill and here's the money for the appropriation." But we didn't get that in the last budget, which tends to tell us that this is more about the title of the bill.

As I said earlier, I think we're going to hear the long comment of the member across the way telling us at what point we've been debating this bill and when they plan on calling the question.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I return to the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock.

Ms. Laurie Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the members from Bramalea-Gore-Malton, Ajax-Pickering, Wellington-Halton Hills and Timmins-James Bay for their comments.

We, in the opposition, are trying, certainly, to get the message through to the government about the importance of agriculture. We do agree with the bill, but we'd like to see more things done for agriculture. We have—I don't know—almost 20 more members who want to speak to this bill, because, as the member from Wellington-Halton Hills said, we don't get a lot of chances to speak about agriculture and we think the farmers would like us to speak more about agriculture in this Legislature, for sure. I don't think they want to see the government shut down debate, as they keep alluding to in all their questions and comments.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture asked for this legislation three years ago. Where has the government been? They have been in power for—are we at 12 years yet?—anyway, a long time. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has been asking for this for at least three years. Definitely for three years, we have it down that they asked for this piece of legislation. If the government is in such a rush now, where were they in the other years?

We talked a lot about youth and keeping the youth involved. We brought up Kemptville College. I want to mention that agriculture programs close to home are extremely important. In Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock, a large majority of my young people wanted to go to eastern Ontario—we're a part of eastern Ontario; some people don't realize that. They wanted to go to Kempt-

ville for the agriculture courses. They were pretty devastated when they were no longer going to be available to them.

1720

We need to grow the agri-food business sector, which, as I said, employs hundreds of thousands of people that we forget about. So we should encourage more agriculture sector development.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for remembering the name of my riding. I know that's a very challenging part of your job because it's a very challenging part of my job.

We've all heard the story of the city mouse and its cousin off in the country. I guess you could ask: What do I, who live in an urban area of Thornhill, have to add to the discussion? Well, I have a lot to add to the discussion, because part of the discussion is about budgeting; part of the discussion is about, as we've said, people being able to save for their retirement and help their kids get an education and get started in life.

We've often spoken about mental and physical health. We all know it's extremely challenging for farmers when the weather is good and co-operating. We can only imagine how difficult it is for farmers when they are seeing ice destroy their apple trees or droughts destroying their crops, and the incredible pressure they must be under 24/7 worrying about all of these things.

It behooves all of us to find solutions, not necessarily just in terms of changing the names of bills or giving government new powers or setting up some kind of insurance scheme or pension fund or help when times are rough. I don't think most farmers want a handout. They just want to be treated fairly, on a level playing field, and have their concerns addressed.

Too often, we see that professionals spend so much time qualifying, requalifying and filling out government forms that they're not left with enough time to practise their profession. We've often heard police complain about that, that they can do less policing when they have to fill out so many reports. We can't expect people who go into professions such as farming to be filling out forms all day long when they need to be addressing concerns.

It comes down to politicians working with the communities, working with the farmers, and finding innovation. I often like to talk about Israel. I know the member opposite who spoke earlier on this bill has visited Israel many times, as have I. It's an innovative country. It has only been around for a little over 60 years, and they have developed so many fantastic agricultural techniques. These are people whose parents weren't in the agricultural sector when they came from Europe and northern Africa. They had to learn about farming on their own and figure things out. They didn't just keep doing things the same old way, the way their parents and their grandparents had done. They tried new techniques. We often hear about drip irrigation, because water is such a

valuable asset. Farmers even in North America and across the world are using all kinds of innovative farming techniques that were developed in Israel, and other countries as well.

That's what we need to be doing. We need to be speaking to the farmers, yes, but we need to be working with agricultural colleges, such as Kemptville, and the universities, the engineering programs, the business sector and food plant processing and asking them, "Where do you see a chance for some kind of innovation?" And instead of giving government grants for research on things that don't necessarily help some of our sectors here in this country, maybe we need to focus a portion of that research on perfecting new techniques for agriculture.

We've all heard the stories. It was going to be a crisis when the world population got over, you know, several billion. People were going to be starving to death because we didn't have enough farming to produce enough grain and rice to feed the people in the world. Innovation took place, where they were able to plant more crops, of higher yield, using less land, less water and less fertilizer. Here we have a state where it was predicted that people were going to be starving, and we have plenty of food in the world. The problem is the distribution of food, not the production of food.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the wine industry, because that has been mentioned repeatedly as something that's growing in Ontario, something that we want to promote here. It's a big tourism draw, not just in Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Niagara Escarpment but in Cornwall and other parts of the province.

As somebody who enjoys visiting some of the wineries and taking the courses and learning about different wines, it was interesting to me to learn that icewine, which Canada and Ontario are quite famous for across the world, was apparently discovered quite by accident. That's how it was explained to me. What happened was, the grapes froze overnight. They play sort of a dangerous game making icewine, because they need to have that exact situation where the grapes are freezing but not completely frozen. They're harvested and smashed while they're still quite frozen so that the juice that comes out is concentrated. What I always picture in my mind is when you make Popsicles in your own freezer at home, if you make it out of apple juice and you eat the Popsicle, you can almost suck out the juice, and you're left with just the ice. That's what they did with the grapes; they were left with just a kind of watery ice, and the syrup that came out was a thick syrup, and they were able to make the icewine.

There's progress being made in terms of maple syrup because across North America, the grading of maple syrup was not the same. We heard a few weeks ago, that there was a private member's bill, I believe, to address that inequality. We want our maple syrup producers to be treated fairly.

There were grants that were given to companies in the GTA and York region by this government for food

processing. My understanding was that the grants were going to be given to rural areas to help with food processing, to promote food processing and agriculture in rural areas. Instead, what happened is, the grants went to apparently Liberal-friendly companies that were producing things as mundane as bread. We're expected to believe that, somehow, it's helping rural communities, agricultural communities, that some big, huge bread-manufacturing plant in the GTA is using eggs. They couldn't even find a plant where they were using all products from Ontario. They were using wheat from Manitoba and all over the country, and all they could even show in one of these processing plants was that the eggs were coming from Ontario.

I don't live in a rural community; it's true. I've tried to do some small gardens when my kids were little. Of course the rabbits came along and ate it all, so I gave up after a few years of that. But I think it does teach us a lesson to try to just grow even a few things in our own backyard, and now there's hydroponics and greenhouses.

When we try to plant even a plant in our own house, we see the challenges; we see how you have to really treat it as a living thing. It needs our undivided attention. So many people, when they go away on vacation or a trip, have a neighbour come in and water their plants. Well, what do farmers do when they have a family emergency or they need to go away? Who's going to take care of their animals? Who's going to take care of their crops? I can just imagine the stress and the challenges that they face.

We all have to eat to survive, but it's up to us, when we're eating the foods that we all enjoy, to recognize where that food came from so that we don't think, like too many people do these days, that the food comes from the supermarket prepackaged. Somebody's entire life was devoted to producing that food. It deserves our respect, and it deserves our commitment to make things better for them, not just in terms of their own business but in terms of them being able to enjoy a good quality of life where they can get a good night's rest and enjoy everything that life has to offer.

1730

I remember when my parents moved to a lake north of Peterborough. We didn't really think of it as a rural community because Peterborough is fairly urban. They came from Montreal on the night that they moved in. Early in the morning, my father was sleeping in, but my mother and I were up. It was about 6 or 6:30 in the morning, and we both got up because we heard a cow mooing. Being city folk, we weren't quite used to hearing cows mooing. I walked out in the hallway and saw my late mother, and I said to her, "Ma, it's time to milk the cows." Anyhow, we were laughing so hard, Mr. Speaker, we had to fall on the floor.

I'll end on that note—

Interjection.

Mrs. Gila Martow: No, we didn't go milk the cows. But the farmer nearby was up that early every single morning.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's once again an honour to be able to rise in this House and follow the member from Thornhill. I did listen intently to her remarks, and I really appreciated them. As someone who grew up with a farm background, a lot of the things she described are very true.

Trying to grow a garden in your backyard is equivalent to agriculture on a miniature scale. When the rabbit comes to eat in the garden—on a commercial farm, lots of times pests will come and also destroy your crops—or just when your seedlings come up, you'll have a heat wave, and it will kill the seedlings.

What the member for Thornhill was talking about was very, very pertinent to this debate today.

Mrs. Gila Martow: What a shock.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, it really was. Specifically, what the member was saying came from her heart; it didn't come from just a couple of stock notes. That's why this debate should continue: because what she was talking about is very, very pertinent to the Agriculture Insurance Act.

We're talking about insuring more products against things that the member from Thornhill was talking about, and we have yet to hear from the government how that's actually going to work. Again, there is nothing in this act, except that the minister has the power to make the regulations after the fact, that actually demonstrates that they're going to follow through with the real purpose of this act.

Yes, when it passes, there is going to be the big press release—the government once again helping farmers. But if they follow through by taking money out of risk management to put it into the Agriculture Insurance Act, it will actually be a net loss for farmers. Could you imagine that? A great press release, but a net loss for farmers. That's why it's so important to be able to debate this in this House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 40 and to respond to the member from Thornhill.

I've heard a lot of comments while I've been here in the House this afternoon, and I have to say that I'm hearing a couple of things over and over again. One thing that's coming through strong and clear is that we are all here to support our local farmers and thriving agribusiness. But the other thing that I think we have to talk about is that this bill actually increases the level of protection for our farmers, so I happen to think that this is a really important bill.

In my riding of Halton, we're fortunate to live in an area that's one of the most productive agricultural areas in the province. You drive down any side road, and you're going to see fields of corn, fruit trees or pumpkins. But you're also going to see bee farms. You're also going to see livestock farms. This area and this sector is

one of the pillars of our thriving economy, and it represents employment for thousands of people and, of course, billions of dollars—\$12.1 billion in this sector alone.

But, Mr. Speaker, as we all know—and we've been talking about, and I've heard from the people in my riding—agricultural markets and the industry are, of course, volatile and unpredictable. People have come to me and said that they would like to see and have more protection. That's what we are talking about here today. It's a tough business. Our local farmers are continually vulnerable to outside forces, and they need help. They need protection. It's important for our farmers to have effective business risk management programs in place. That's what this Agriculture Insurance Act aims to do.

Ontario's inability to offer production insurance plans for commodities beyond crops and perennial plants represents a significant gap, and we're going to make sure that this doesn't continue. We're extending the protection.

I'm proud and pleased to be here today to rise and speak in support of this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise again to commend the member from Thornhill for a very good presentation on this bill, but my comments are primarily going to be to the member from Halton. I appreciate the comments she made as to how we're all here to do the best we can for the people we represent. It happens to be that most of us on this side of the House represent the agricultural and rural part of the province—and where the member from Halton would fit in with that.

The truth is, when she was describing this bill—I just want to point out that she needs to get someone from the Ministry of Agriculture to explain the bill just a little further. This bill does not provide a single bit of extra protection. This bill gives the minister authority, if he wishes, to add agriculture products as opposed to just the crops. Now crop insurance and agriculture insurance only cover disaster or the elements of nature. If there is a decline in the price of the product, as you mentioned—in fact, this bill has nothing to do with the price of the product. That is the risk management part of the program, but this isn't risk management. We're talking about weather or illness insurance.

I want to point out that one of the farmers' comments about this was just that, and it's the other side of that: What concerns them most is that they may lose risk management for their cattle, because presently the risk management program covers all the issues to deal with cattle. So if they lose money with cattle or if the price is down, if the cattle didn't do well and they don't have enough to cover their expenses, risk management comes in and pays the bill and helps them stay afloat. This is only if there's a disease or some element that takes away the actual livestock. If the bottom drops out of the market, they get nothing for that and they go bankrupt because they have no protection.

I just want to finish off by saying this—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'm going to go back on a bit of a theme that we've been trying to explore in this particular bill, and that is, at this point the government has never come out and responded to the question, are they going to do an appropriation of dollars in order to make sure that the crop insurance bill is actually funded? I haven't heard one government member get up to this point and say, "Well, of course it will be. Wait till the next budget."

I just say again, the government has a bill that by title sounds like a good thing. They've got a bill in detail that we can support, that we think is a good thing. The question becomes this: If I was the government and I knew I was moving this bill last spring, which they would have known—or last summer, I should say, after the general election—I would have put in my budget the appropriation dollars for this bill.

Mr. Arthur Potts: What if they vote you down, Gilles?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Good accounting practices as the reason they vote people down? That doesn't make any sense.

But anyway, my point is that you would put the appropriation in last year's budget and then you would have introduced the bill, but in the budget you would have said, "Mr. Speaker, our government is going to put in place X number of dollars in order to fund a bill on crop insurance that we'll be introducing in this House later on this year, and we want to see it have quick passage."

That would have been one way to do it. But the government has another option. They could do what they seem to be doing now, which is to introduce the bill and then, hopefully, in this year's budget coming up in 2015-16, the government does the appropriation then. But I tend to think that is not the case because, as the member for Timiskaming–Cochrane, our ag critic, pointed out, it's been 13 years that the government could have brought the legislation forward, because the agriculture ministers across the land have agreed to this scheme. They could have done it 13 years ago and they didn't. It leaves us with the question, and I hope the government will answer this in debate, are you planning on doing the appropriation for this bill to make sure this new bill is properly funded?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Thornhill.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I want to thank the members from Timiskaming–Cochrane, Halton, Oxford and Timmins–James Bay—hopefully I pronounced the first one correctly.

I guess it comes down to how: How is this going to be done? We hear a lot of people from the government side talking about what they want to achieve, but I'm not hearing too much about how we're going to create less risk, better protection or better risk management.

1740

Obviously, as I said before, we need more innovation. That's what's really needed here. We need to realize that

we could be a leader in agriculture in North America and the world in all aspects and in food processing, but we need to be more innovative. We can't just rely on trucking and proximity to markets.

The member from Oxford mentioned insurance for prices going down. Well, you know what? I think there should be some kind of balance between decreasing the risks enough that people are able to sleep at night—we have to balance that in terms of a free market system. We can't always guarantee the exact kind of risk management that maybe people would like.

I'm reminded, actually, of when people used to say that they didn't like farming tobacco. I remember reading that many times. People didn't like being tobacco farmers. They knew it wasn't contributing to the welfare of making the world a better and healthier place, but it was a very lucrative crop. You used to hear the term "cash crop." It was very lucrative, and that's why people did it.

We have to find that balance in terms of agriculture and have some kind of point system—what we want them to grow, the way we want them to grow—where, if people are growing things, we give them the ability to do it with incentives.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Kitchener–Conestoga.

Interjections.

Mr. Michael Harris: I was waiting.

Mr. Arthur Potts: This will be another roundabout discussion.

Mr. Michael Harris: Stay tuned.

Speaker, thanks for the opportunity to speak today to Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act, a piece of legislation that is probably a decade too late and, as I will detail, more than a few dollars short.

I will say, though, that I'm happy to stand up to speak today on Bill 40. I will also say that in the past, cutting some of our bills short does and has prevented some of the members from speaking on behalf of their constituents. I look at Bill 56 as a great example of one; I simply didn't get that opportunity to speak to it and would have loved to have had that opportunity. Nonetheless, the community that I come from in Kitchener–Conestoga, a significant agricultural community as well in southwestern Ontario—I look forward to providing my commentary on behalf of those folks.

For more than a decade, the government proposing this bill—which sits across from us, of course—has really ignored the calls for expansion of crop insurance as they have instead misused countless billions to the point that they sit under four OPP investigations; and now they come to us with a proposal that many welcome but, given the history, leaves many unanswered questions.

Speaker, just for a minute, I would like to read from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's 2011—that's three years ago—issue note with regard to the agri-insurance program. You'll note some of the issues they raise date back to 2003—coincident, I'm sure, with the onset of the current Liberal government.

Under the heading "Agri-Insurance Program," the OFA website indicates:

"National, government-supported crop insurance coverage plans for some crops have been available in Canada for over 40 years. Plans have evolved over time. For insured crops, insurance coverage provides production risk protection to producers by minimizing the economic effects of crop losses caused by specified perils (such as drought, flood, hail, frost, excessive moisture and insects).

"Typically farmers pay 40% of the total premium cost. The federal and provincial governments each pay 30% of the premiums and share the administration costs 50/50. In Ontario, coverage on 90 commercially grown crops is delivered by Agricorp (a provincial government agency). Agricorp reports that more than 16,000 producers and five million acres of Ontario farmland are insured each year.

"Under the APF, effective April 1, 2003, crop insurance became known as production insurance. Both levels of government also committed to creating new insurance plans to cover livestock and crops that did not have coverage. Unfortunately, little progress was made towards this commitment under the APF.

"Under the Growing Forward framework agreement, governments amended the production insurance agreement by renaming it the federal-provincial agri-insurance agreement. The Growing Forward framework agreement states that:

"Agri-insurance provides insurance against production losses for specified perils. The federal government contributes to agri-insurance contracts offered to producers by provinces or territories. The commodities covered vary by province or territory, and will expand to cover additional commodities."

"The OFA remains disappointed with the slow progress made by governments with respect to developing new insurance products. This disappointment is aggravated by the governments' decision to terminate the self-directed risk management program leaving many horticulture, honey and maple syrup producers without any protection. Insurance coverage has been developed for some horticultural crops. Progress has been made towards developing insurance coverage for bees. Livestock insurance coverage will likely not be made available to farmers any time soon."

That was the feeling in 2011. After years and years of waiting, farmers felt little progress. Really, given the circumstances, could you blame them?

As we've heard, Bill 40 amends the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996, to expand the scope of the act. Specifically, the bill would expand the act so that it would apply to not only agricultural crops and perennial plants as it currently does, but also to all agricultural products that are designated by the minister through regulation.

Speaker, history has shown that crop insurance—where costs are shared by producers, the provincial and federal governments—can mean the difference between paying the bills and losing the farm. For almost 90 commercially grown crops including grains and oilseeds,

like corn, soy, wheat, tree fruits and grapes, vegetables, specialty crops and forage, it can mean keeping the farm going, feeding the family and, ultimately, creating jobs.

There's no doubt that farmers across the province would welcome the opportunity to work with their associations and consult with Agricornp to determine the needs of producers for specific commodities. In fact, I'm sure many of them wondered why, when they had an agricultural minister who was also the Premier of the province, the minister failed to bring this to fruition previously.

Certainly, after more than a decade of waiting, the expansion beyond vegetables, fruit, honey and tobacco would be important not only for farmers themselves but for the provincial agricultural sector as a whole. The fact is, Speaker, that Ontario stands alone as the only province without authority to offer production insurance plans for agricultural products beyond crops and perennial plants. It's well past the time to bring Ontario in line with the rest of the country.

That said, while we support the direction of the bill, we do wonder—farmers wonder—what commodities will be considered for coverage. In 2013, more than 14,000 farmers had crop insurance in Ontario, representing more than five million acres of farmland. The open-ended nature of this bill does raise the concern that it doesn't lead to a situation where there is a reduction in available funding for those already covered. I feel that it's essential that when this bill passes second reading, it goes out for full consultation to ensure these new changes don't take away from the existing programs that aid farmers—across the province, not just here in Toronto.

All that said, while farmers and we in the official opposition are willing to support the direction we hope this is heading in, given the history of the government's approach to agriculture, there is and will be reason for concern.

I will remind members of the eyebrow-raising year-end grant processes that prompted our then agriculture critic, the member from Oxford, to write the following letter to the agriculture Premier. It was dated May 2—and this is from our agriculture critic, the good member from Oxford, who is attentively listening to this debate. He wrote: "My concern is that you and your ministry have given out more than \$11.5 million in year-end funds without any public application process. I am concerned that recipients were only invited to apply based on their relationship with your ministry.

"I specifically asked staff from your ministry whether the application form was publicly available and was told clearly that it was not.

"The Auditor General was very clear in his report on Ministry of Citizenship funds that the availability of grants should be communicated publicly. In fact, in his report he stated: 'However, for this process to meet the expectations of being fair, open and transparent, it will be necessary for the ministry to ensure that the potential availability of year-end grants is widely communicated to potential applicants and that eligibility and assessment criteria are established and consistently applied.'

"The grants I am referencing are not part of the Local Food Fund. They are the six grants of year-end funds that were not part of any established program. In fact your staff informed us that two of the grants had to be specially approved through Treasury Board because they did not fit the guidelines of any established programs within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food."

He goes on to say: "In our briefing OMAF staff were quite clear that the grants were approved by an 'industry panel.' I ask you to clarify exactly who was involved in making these decisions, whether it was an industry panel as they told us or the rural economic development advisory committee as you now claim.

"I am questioning the transparency, fairness and openness of the grant process that you put in place."

Again, it's the lack of transparency and fairness that we don't want to see repeated once this legislation is in place. And there's further reason for caution when you consider the Premier's handling of our province's agricultural colleges, an issue that again prompted action from the member for Oxford.

He writes, "I was very disappointed and troubled to hear you are closing Kemptville and Alfred agricultural colleges. These colleges are an important part of developing our future farmers. I know from my experience as Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs that this decision would not have been made without the involvement of your ministry and usually the minister. Our farmers are aging. We need to encourage more young people to enter careers in agriculture, and yet by allowing these colleges to close, you are taking [away] the ability of a lot of young people in eastern Ontario to get the skills they need to become farmers."

I've got a few seconds left. There's some content that I still want to get on the record, Speaker. I'll leave it at that and I look forward to finishing the last two minutes.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. This House stands adjourned until Monday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1752.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiles, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Emie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Hudak, Tim (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara- Ouest–Glanbrook	
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario)
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Women's Issues / Ministre déléguée à la Condition féminine
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London- Centre-Nord	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	
McDonnell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	
McGarry, Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	
McMahon, Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	
McMeekin, Hon. / L'hon. Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough– Westdale	Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing / Ministre des Affaires municipales et du Logement
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	
Meilleur, Hon. / L'hon. Madeleine (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	Attorney General / Procureure générale Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	
Miller, Norm (PC)	Parry Sound–Muskoka	
Miller, Paul (NDP)	Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research and Innovation / Ministre de la Recherche et de l'Innovation
		Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities / Ministre de la Formation et des Collèges et Universités
Munro, Julia (PC)	York–Simcoe	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Indira (LIB)	Halton	
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Natyshak, Taras (NDP)	Essex	
Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Chatham-Kent–Essex	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Orazietti, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Sault Ste. Marie	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Pettapiece, Randy (PC)	Perth–Wellington	
Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brook	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiane (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales
		Premier / Première ministre
		Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
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Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones

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Grant Crack, Han Dong
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Randy Hillier, Sophie Kiwala
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Eleanor McMahon, Lisa M. Thompson
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permanent des organismes gouvernementaux**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Cristina Martins
Vic Dhillon, John Fraser
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Harinder Malhi, Cristina Martins
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Lou Rinaldi
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Lorenzo Berardinetti, Bob Delaney
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Arthur Potts, Shafiq Qaadi
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permanent de l'Assemblée législative**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Garfield Dunlop
Granville Anderson, Bas Balkissoon
Chris Ballard, Toby Barrett
Garfield Dunlop, Eleanor McMahon
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Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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des comptes publics**

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Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Han Dong, John Fraser
Ernie Hardeman, Percy Hatfield
Lisa MacLeod, Harinder Malhi
Julia Munro, Arthur Potts
Lou Rinaldi
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

**Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité
permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé**

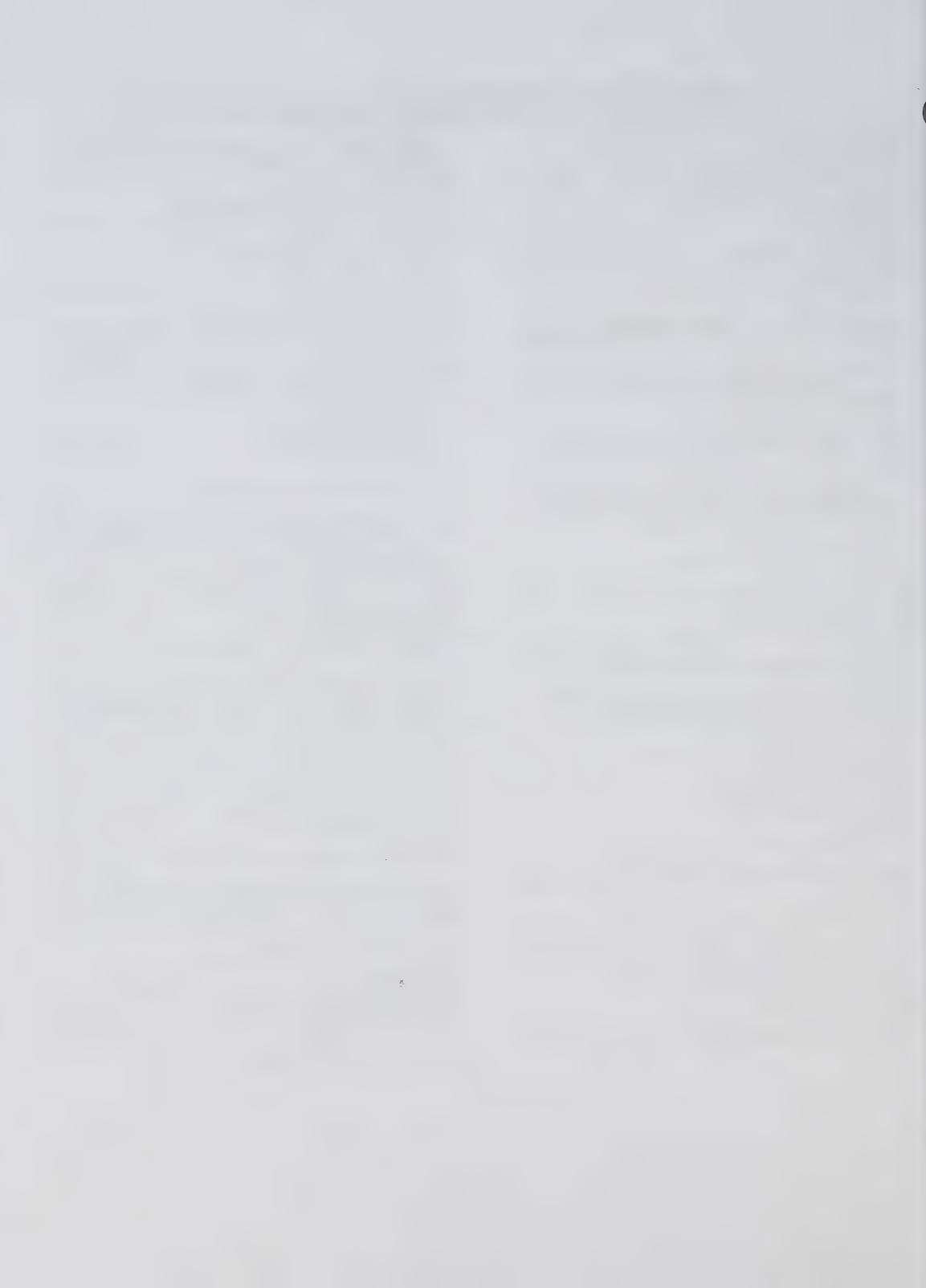
Chair / Présidente: Indira Naidoo-Harris
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Kathryn McGarry
Robert Bailey, Lorenzo Berardinetti
Jennifer K. French, Monte Kwinter
Amrit Mangat, Kathryn McGarry
Indira Naidoo-Harris, Daiene Vernile
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de
la politique sociale**

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: France Gélinas
Granville Anderson, Vic Dhillon
Christine Elliott, France Gélinas
Marie-France Lalonde, Amrit Mangat
Gila Martow, Kathryn McGarry
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

**Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment /
Comité spécial de la violence et du harcèlement à caractère
sexuel**

Chair / Présidente: Daiene Vernile
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laurie Scott
Han Dong, Randy Hillier
Marie-France Lalonde, Harinder Malhi
Kathryn McGarry, Eleanor McMahon
Taras Natyshak, Peggy Sattler
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Government
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**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**

First Session, 41st Parliament



**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**

Première session, 41^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Monday 9 March 2015

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Lundi 9 mars 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 9 March 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 9 mars 2015

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Please help me welcome the grade 10 students and teachers from St. Augustine Catholic High School in the great city of Markham.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I know that all members of the House will want to join me in congratulating the University of Guelph Gryphons men's hockey team on winning the Queen's Cup on Saturday night, beating Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières 4-0. They go on now to play in the Canadian championships in Halifax. I know we'd all want to congratulate that fine hockey team.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Wonderful guests. The member from Parkdale-High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's my delight to introduce one of the oldest and one of the best collegiate institutes in Ontario: HumberSide in the House.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a number of introductions today, some of our pages and their guests. Legislative page Hannah Tang from Mississauga-Streetsville is hosting her family today. Please welcome her father, Hong-chang Tang; her mom, Michelle Chen; and her younger sister, Jessica Tang. Hannah is the page captain today. Please welcome them.

As well, on behalf of the member for Eglinton-Lawrence and on behalf of page captain Arlyne James, I'd like to introduce Sheliagh Flynn James, her mother; her father, George James; her brother, Connall James; her sister, Keelin James; her grandfather, Dr. Bill James; and her uncle, Paul James. They will be in the members' gallery this morning. Would members please welcome them.

Hon. Liz Sandals: First of all, I must mention that the member from Wellington-Halton Hills is very modest because he failed to mention that one of the winning members of the Guelph Gryphons is his nephew.

So, what I just wanted to do, on behalf of the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and myself, is welcome all the members of the Canadian Federation of Students who are visiting with us today. This is the CFS lobby day, so welcome to all the members of CFS, and particularly those from U of G.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It gives me great pleasure to introduce the mom of Julie Darling, Mary Darling, in the members' gallery, from wonderful downtown Castleton.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure to introduce to this House today, in the members' gallery, nine fantastic Portuguese Canadian women who have made significant contributions to our society across various sectors. They are: Ana Ochôa; Ana Paula Ribeiro; Angela Machado; Rosa De Sousa; Lucillia Simas; Suzanne Cunha; Paula Medeiros; and Lisa Fara. Welcome, ladies.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am pleased to welcome Katherine Bowes, the mother of Amber Bowes, who is a page from Oshawa. She's here in the gallery today.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I am very pleased to introduce today at Queen's Park Caio Penatti, who is a co-op student in my constituency office from Dante Alighieri high school; accompanied by Meaghan Salmons, my executive assistant. Please help me welcome them.

Mr. Han Dong: In the members' gallery, I would like to welcome my former colleague, Kaley Ames, from St. Paul's, and also Avi Ames, visiting all the way from BC. Welcome.

Hon. David Oraziotti: It's a pleasure today to introduce Sylvia Peña and Johnmark Roberts from the Ontario Real Estate Association, who are here.

ANDREW JOSEPH DOIRON

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to observe a moment of silence for Andrew Joseph Doiron, a Canadian Forces soldier who was killed in Iraq on Saturday.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent for a moment of silence for the fallen soldier. Do we agree?

I would ask that all members in the House please rise for a moment of silence.

The House observed a moment's silence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank everyone for that kind tribute.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FEMME

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order, the government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent that representatives from each caucus speak for up to five minutes in recognition of International Women's Day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent that we have representatives from each caucus speak up to five minutes in recognition of International Women's Day. Do we agree? Agreed.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, I'm so pleased to rise and speak to this House today as we continue to celebrate International Women's Day.

I want to take this time to acknowledge the accomplishments of women and the progress that we've made advancing gender equality here in Ontario.

Je veux prendre le temps de reconnaître les réalisations des femmes et les progrès que nous avons faits envers l'égalité des sexes en Ontario.

1040

But before I do, I want to go back to the first International Women's Day. In 1910, at the International Conference of Working Women, a German woman named Clara Zetkin put forward the idea of an international day for women. Her idea was that every year in every country there should be a day for women to advocate for each other.

According to the United Nations, Clara's idea was endorsed by over 100 women from 17 countries who were attending the conference. A year later, the first International Women's Day was held in 1911 on March 19. More than one million women and men participated in rallies campaigning for women's right to work, to hold public office and to vote.

Today, every year on March 8, thousands of events are held throughout the world to inspire women, celebrate our achievements and build momentum for the work we need to do to increase gender equality here in Ontario and all around the world, because we all know that more work needs to be done. More work needs to be done because in 2015 there are still too many women who are told that their opinions don't count. There are still too many women who are intimidated, marginalized and discounted for the simple fact that they're women. They're told that they have no real influence. They're told that they will never achieve their goals. They're told that they will never be equal. And so more work needs to be done to build a better world for women and to build a fairer, more equal society for all, because I believe, Mr. Speaker, that those two go hand in hand.

As a woman, as a mother, as a grandmother and as the first female Premier of Ontario, I'm committed to doing more.

En tant que femme, mère, grand-mère, et en tant que la première femme première ministre de l'Ontario, je me suis engagée à faire plus.

Because when you empower women, when you address issues that disproportionately affect women, you

will strengthen and build up society so it becomes more fair and inclusive for everyone.

I'm very proud to see the efforts reflected in Ontario. I'm proud that we have the most women elected to this Legislature than at any time in our history: 38 women. I'm proud, personally, to have seven women around the cabinet table and 12 more women in our caucus, and I'm proud of the efforts that our government continues to make.

Our government has brought in wage increases for early childhood educators and personal support workers, the majority of whom are women. We have increased the minimum wage to \$11 an hour and indexed it to inflation, helping low-income women, who are the majority of minimum wage earners in Ontario.

We're also supporting parents through Ontario's full-day kindergarten program. In September 2014, full-day kindergarten was fully implemented and is now benefiting approximately 265,000 children across Ontario. Since 2003-04, we've increased the capacity of licensed centre-based child care programs by 57%, and we've increased the Ontario Child Benefit to a maximum of \$1,310 per child per year. Through the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the child poverty rate in single-mother-led families in Ontario has dropped from 43% to 36%. The Ontario Women's Directorate is providing low-income women with the training that they need to get better paying jobs. The Microlending for Women in Ontario program is helping low-income women build and grow their businesses.

Women make up an integral part of Ontario's economy and society, but on average they still do not earn as much as men, which is why our government is committed to leading the development of a wage gap strategy. Recently, Ontario became the first jurisdiction in Canada to require companies listed on the TSX to report publicly on their approach to increasing the number of women on their boards, because that glass ceiling may be cracking, but it is still in place, Mr. Speaker.

We'll continue to call on the federal government to take meaningful action to address the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. I want to acknowledge the important work that is being done by the minister responsible for women's issues, who is at the United Nations today as part of the Canadian delegation on the status of women.

Applause.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Exactly.

I also want to acknowledge the member for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock and the leader of the third party both for their work advancing Ontario's Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment. Thank you very much for that.

Last Friday our government launched It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment. The plan will raise public awareness of sexual violence and harassment in Ontario. It will help survivors so that they're better supported when they reach out for the help that they need. It will strengthen our laws to help ensure that workplaces are free from sexual violence and

harassment. Above all, it will challenge the deep-rooted attitudes and behaviours that contribute to sexual violence and harassment in the first place—I'm talking about misogyny and how it is never okay.

This year's theme for International Women's Day is "Make It Happen." I believe that, as a government, we are taking this call to action to heart. We are taking a different approach to government.

Je me suis engagée à adopter une nouvelle approche de gouvernance, et une partie de cela est grâce à la perspective que j'apporte en tant que la première femme première ministre de l'Ontario.

It's a perspective that's focused on people, investing in their skills, their ideas, their capacity for greatness.

In closing, I want to quote from Nellie McClung, a woman in politics and a personal hero of mine. She said, "The women who have achieved success in the various fields of labour have won victory for us, but unless we all follow up and press onward the advantage will be lost. Yesterday's success will not do for today."

Though those words were spoken 100 years ago, I believe they're still important, Mr. Speaker. They remind us how far we've come as women, and they remind us that we have more to do in order to create that fair and equal society that we know is possible here in Ontario.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak today on behalf of my PC colleagues in recognizing International Women's Day.

Every year, the government of Canada and the United Nations establish themes for International Women's Day. This year, the Honourable Dr. Kellie Leitch, Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, is focusing on strength with the tagline, "Strong Women, Strong World: Improving Economic Opportunities For All." The theme for International Women's Day, which was proclaimed by the United Nations is, "Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity: Picture it!"

These two themes complement each other. When we look at the inequalities and injustice which many women still face today in our country and around the world, these themes seem very appropriate.

International Women's Day is an opportunity for Canadians to celebrate the great progress which has been made in Canada towards women's equality, but also to recognize the disgraceful treatment of women and the suppression of women's right in far too many other countries around the world. It is disturbing to note just how slow this progress has been.

While collectively society might think this is a relatively new initiative, the first International Women's Day was observed on March 19 in 1911 in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland.

Some of the basic inequalities which were prevalent in 1911, such as women's suffrage, property and marital rights and even to be legally recognized as a "person" under the law, are still distant dreams in much of the world.

The plight of women in terms of equality are the worst in some of the poorest and most suppressive countries in the world.

The implication of this year's themes is that through the equality and empowerment of 50% of the population, not only would individual women prosper and grow but so would their societies and their countries in general.

In Canada, the progress of women in education, business, government, politics, sports and the arts has benefited the entire country. Much of our prosperity today can be attributed to the ever-increasing roles which women have played in our society. I only have to look in this chamber to see the success that women can now have in politics. Even the Olympics would have been nowhere near as successful for Canada had it not been for our female athletes who, in many cases, outshone their male counterparts.

However, with every shining light there are unfortunately shadows of darkness. It is impossible to discuss International Women's Day and the status of women without acknowledging one of the most hideous scars on our society. Of course I'm referring to the ongoing sexual violence and harassment against women.

In recent years, the degree of this problem has been brought into our living room through a series of tragic incidents. Last November, I raised this serious issue with the Premier on several occasions during question period, asking for the establishment of an all-party select committee to thoroughly investigate the issue of sexual harassment and violence in the workplace.

After a number of weeks, the government agreed to the creation of the committee. Last week, the Premier appears to have pre-empted the work of the committee by announcing a significant program with funding for addressing the issue.

1050

I laud the Premier's actions from last week, but I'm somewhat disappointed that she chose to make this a political announcement rather than fully utilize the work and commitment of the all-party select committee. The method by which this program was announced did put somewhat of a pall over its intent, which is unfortunate. However, regardless of the strategy that was employed, it was a positive step that I fully support.

I want to conclude by congratulating all the female trailblazers for their dedication and commitment to advancing women's rights and equality. International Women's Day provides us with an opportunity to commemorate these efforts, celebrate progress and call for a commitment to continue the push for women's equality.

Next year, we will again offer remarks on the 2016 International Women's Day. I am optimistic enough to hope that, over the next year, we will see significant progress on a number of fronts in both Canada and the rest of the world. However, I am also enough of a realist to be under no illusions that for millions of women, their lot in life will be no better. Consequently, this is not a subject that will ever allow us to let down our guard or bask in

our victory in progress. There is much to be done now and in the years ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: On behalf of New Democrats, I'm honoured to rise and speak about International Women's Day. This International Women's Day, we, as a province, have a lot to reflect on as we look at the year that was. It was a year when horrible realities that so many women have faced in their everyday lives were pushed into the public eye.

We have seen the culture of fear and secrecy that exists in workplaces where powerful men are allowed to act with impunity. We have seen how many women's voices can be silenced by a single male voice, especially when they are backed by institutions that are willing to protect them.

We have seen a culture of misogyny on campus, where young minds are being shaped and future professionals are obtaining their credentials. We have seen the explosion of precarious work and part-time work, where women—particularly immigrant women—are over-represented.

We've seen the harassment and stalking that women face online.

We have seen doctors still allowed to practise medicine even after being found to have perpetuated sexual assaults on women patients, and a regulatory body that is not required to immediately involve the police when they learn of these crimes.

We continue to see women with no choices but to return to abusive partners. Women are still dying, and their children are still being traumatized.

We continue to see women paid, on average, 30% less than their male counterparts.

We continue to learn of aboriginal women across our nation who are missing or have been murdered, but we do not see justice for them or their families.

The face of poverty is still a woman's face; disproportionately, an immigrant woman's face.

In the face of all this, it is clear how far we still have to go before we have a just, safe and equal province. We should be addressing the systemic issues that marginalize women. Instead, we have a government that continues to impose deep cuts to services in Ontario.

We know that it is women who disproportionately bear the brunt of these cuts. Across the province, closures of obstetrics wards, support centres for women in crisis and child care centres are leaving women vulnerable. The fragmented and inadequate home-care and long-term-care systems are hurting women, and the explosion of precarious work and unpaid work under this government is pushing more and more women to the margins. So many of the public sector workers already on the picket lines in this year, 2015, are women workers: nurses, educational workers and women who deliver Ontario's public services.

We must do better, and we can do better. New Democrats actually have been demonstrating how we will do better. In fact, we have a caucus now that is 50%

women—the only caucus in Ontario and the only caucus in the country that has ever achieved that goal. I can tell you, as the leader of this caucus, and I think all of my caucus members would agree, particularly those who were around when it wasn't a situation of 50% women in our caucus, that it makes a difference. It makes a difference in the tone that we address ourselves with; it makes a difference in the way that we approach the work that we do here; it makes a very, very positive difference. I think the MPPs who make up the NDP caucus would agree with me in that regard.

This was a year where women refused to stay silent in the face of rape, harassment and assault. We must thank those women for their courage and take pride in the public discourse that it has spurred. As women, we must continue to take up our space, to continue to stand up and speak with our equal voices proudly, anywhere, anytime.

All of us, women and men, must recommit ourselves to speak up and act with women and for women. That's how we can truly celebrate International Women's Day. Thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

ORAL QUESTIONS

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. Last Thursday, the Deputy Premier did an admirable job of reciting the resumé for the new member for Sudbury, rather than answering my questions.

Premier, you've said that you made the decision to appoint Mr. Thibeault as your candidate on November 30. You also claim that you didn't want Andrew Olivier to find out in the news. Premier, as his future boss, did you instruct Mr. Thibeault to remain in the House of Commons and delay his resignation to avoid Mr. Olivier finding out, or did you instruct Mr. Thibeault to remain an MP until your operatives could sway Mr. Olivier with an alleged bribe?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the member opposite understands that at those moments in a pre-election situation, people make decisions for themselves in terms of their timing, their families and when they will make decisions public.

I also know that the member opposite understands that this whole situation is something we're taking very seriously, that there is an investigation that is ongoing, but that that investigation is taking place outside of this House, and that's where we need to let it take place.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Again, back to the Premier. During the same question period, your Deputy Premier referred to you in this way: "She is a woman who thought through very clearly what she needed to do." I would like you to think very clearly about this: The people of Sudbury re-

ceived taxpayer-funded mailouts from your candidate after he announced his intention to run for you.

Premier, will the Ontario Liberal Party reimburse the House of Commons for Mr. Thibeault's self-promoting propaganda mailout?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would be happy—if the member opposite wants to have a conversation, we can have a little bit of a comparison about who's getting householders from whom at the federal level. A member of the Conservative Party initiating that conversation I think is an interesting turn of events, but I would be very happy to have that conversation. Maybe we could have a show and tell—we could bring in all the householders that we've got from federal members from other ridings.

The member opposite knows full well that there's an investigation going on and that investigation is taking place outside of this House.

Interjections.

1100

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. As I have said a few times, some of the questions are moving slowly away from the topic of government business. I'm going to remind everyone that it's your duty to pull it back into that position. I'm just offering the member a word of advice.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Speaker, for the advice.

Again, back to the Premier: I didn't actually expect you were willing to pay the taxpayer back, because wasting a couple of thousand taxpayer dollars is really nothing new to this government when you figure they've wasted \$1.1 billion on the gas plants, \$1.9 billion on smart meters, \$1 billion on eHealth and another \$1 billion on Ornge. A couple of thousand taxpayer dollars might not be a waste for Mr. Thibeault, either. After all, as federal NDP caucus chair, he must have known about the \$2.75 million of taxpayers' money his caucus wrongly spent on mailouts and satellite offices.

Premier, do you agree that this mailout is an example of misspent taxpayer money? Or is it just another example of the cost of your government doing business?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let's be clear that the member for Sudbury remained MP and continued his duties until the end of December. He was the MP for Sudbury; that is the fact. Then there was a by-election, and he was our candidate. That's the reality.

In terms of the other issues that the member opposite raises—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That will do. The minister responsible for seniors has done it again, so he's on my list.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: In terms of the other issues that the member opposite raises, I am quite sure the member opposite understands that it's extremely important that our health system, for example, have electronic health records and that there be connectivity in our health system. If he doesn't understand that, he should go to doctors' offices and he should find out how doctors are functioning now with electronic health records and how they are moving into the 21st century. I'm sure he values that that progress is happening.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. In December 2003, you rose in this House to deliver your maiden speech. You said at that time, "They have every right to expect me to demonstrate that position and status cannot be allowed to undermine fundamental decency, honesty and integrity."

Now, with four OPP investigations in your office, you seem to have cast aside those words. Premier, why have you allowed the position and status of the Premier's office to undermine your fundamental decency, honesty and integrity in the Sudbury by-election?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I challenge the premise of the question from the interim Leader of the Opposition. I have done my utmost at every turn, on whatever issue, to be open with the people of Ontario, to be very clear about what our position is and to be clear about how we are going to move forward.

I know that the member opposite is talking specifically about the Sudbury by-election. I made a statement a couple of weeks ago. I laid out exactly what our position was.

Beyond that, I have been very clear and open that there is an investigation going on and that I will work with the authorities, but that that investigation is, appropriately, taking place outside of this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Premier: Premier, let me read you a quote. "The government's strategy is obviously to isolate, obfuscate, deny, deny, deny, and hope that everybody just gets tired of it." That statement was from Liberal MP Ralph Goodale, and it was referring to a condemnation of the actions of one of the Prime Minister's senior staff, who, by the way, did the right thing and stepped down.

The Deputy Premier has even called our questioning of the apparent bribery "boring." Well, apparent contraventions of bribery laws are anything but boring to Ontarians. The latest Forum poll shows that an astonishing two thirds of Ontarians know about the issue, and an astonishing two thirds of Ontarians want Pat Sorbara to step down.

Premier, are you hoping everyone just gets tired of the four OPP investigations into your office and that they'll just go away?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just quote from the PC House leader, who said on February 27 of this

year, "Stop interfering in an ongoing investigation, and let it run its course."

I have been very clear that we will work with the authorities, that there is an investigation going on and that that investigation is taking place outside of this House. We'll work with the authorities, Mr. Speaker, and that's as it should be.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Again to the Premier: When asked about former Premier McGuinty, you said, "We're different people, we have different styles and it's a different time."

The OPP started two investigations into Mr. McGuinty's office. Now, under your lead, there are two more. Mr. McGuinty has a chief of staff under OPP investigation; you have a deputy chief of staff under investigation. He had Peter Faist clean up a mess; you had Gerry Lougheed try to do the same. Mr. McGuinty ignored the truths about Ornge, eHealth and the gas plant scandals; you're ignoring the truth about Sudbury.

Premier, you are no different than Mr. McGuinty. When will you show Ontarians and the Office of the Premier the respect it deserves and the integrity you promised?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, whatever the rhetoric is that the interim Leader of the Opposition wants to pull out, whatever framework he wants to put around this, I need to be true to what I know is the responsible course of action. I have made a statement publicly. I've been very clear about our position. I have been clear in this House over and over again that I made a decision about who I believe the candidate should be for us in the Sudbury by-election.

There is an investigation that is ongoing. That investigation is not taking place in this House; it's taking place outside of this House.

I understand that the opposition wants to try to ramp this up and they want to try to keep it alive. I understand that. That is in their political interest. It is in the province's interest that we continue to do the work that's in the best interest of the people of the province while at the same time co-operating with the authorities.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. How many cabinet meetings has Pat Sorbara attended since the police told Ontarians that she was facing OPP anti-rackets squad investigations?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I was very clear, in the statement I made a couple of weeks ago, about the course of action that I was going to take, and that is a matter of public record. The fact is that there is an investigation going on. We'll work with the authorities; I will work with the authorities; Pat Sorbara will work with the authorities; and anyone on my team who is requested to will work with the authorities. But that investigation is not

taking place in this House; it's taking place outside of the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: How many government policy or operations decisions has Pat Sorbara been involved in since it was announced that she is facing two OPP anti-racket investigations?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I have said that the investigation is taking place outside this House.

But I want to go back to what the Chief Electoral Officer clearly stated. What the Chief Electoral Officer said in his report is, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

Those decisions have not been made. I think the leader of the third party knows that, and she knows that the investigation is rightly taking place outside of this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: How many meetings with stakeholders has Pat Sorbara participated in since it was announced that she is facing two OPP anti-rackets squad investigations?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, Mr. Speaker, I will give the same answer to the leader of the third party, and that is to remind her that the Chief Electoral Officer, whose report is the only report that has come in at this point, said, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

In fact, any investigation that's taking place is happening outside of this House, not inside the Legislature.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the Premier: This government is in a mess and it is of the Premier's making. Ontarians are seeing the same bad ethics from the Liberals that they've seen for a dozen years.

This Premier said she was going to be different; she'd clean things up; she'd be open and transparent. Instead, she is in lockdown, and she won't answer any questions. She's protecting senior Liberals who are under criminal investigation. In spite of all of the promises, nothing ever seems to change.

Will the Premier finally do the right thing and relieve Pat Sorbara of her duties today?

1110

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I think the characterization, on the part of the leader of the third party, of what is going on in Ontario is a little bleak. I've said to her over and over again that I understand there is an investigation going on and that we will co-operate. But in the meantime, there is a lot of work that is getting done.

I will draw the leader of the third party's attention to the action plan we released on Friday, which is a significant step forward in terms of our ability to deal with

public awareness of sexual assault and sexual violence. Money will be invested in front-line services. On the day after International Women's Day, I think that's something we can celebrate and make sure we deliver on those promises, which is exactly what we will do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Premier's top aide is facing not one, but two, OPP anti-rackets squad investigations, not to mention the other two OPP investigations into her government. That's more than Mike Duffy, that's more than Nigel Wright, that's more than Rob Ford. Yet Pat Sorbara is still providing advice to the Premier, because the Premier thinks she knows better than the OPP, better than Elections Ontario, better than the tapes of Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed, which anyone can hear.

Will the Premier admit that she is wrong to keep Pat Sorbara working and have her step aside while these investigations are ongoing? Have her step aside today—just do the right thing.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, what I say to the member opposite is that I've made a public statement. I've been very clear about what my course of action will be. I've said that I will work with the authorities.

But in the meantime, there's very important work that has to be done for the people of this province. There was a very serious rail incident in Gogama this past weekend. Our member for Sudbury was there; I know that the member for Nickel Belt was also there. I also know that it's going to be very important that we, in this House, call on the federal government, as the leader of the NDP federally has done—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please.

While the Premier is putting the answer, the injections of the Minister of Agriculture and the deputy House leader are at best annoying, and they will stop.

Please finish.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Our Minister of Transportation will be contacting the federal transport minister and both CN and CP to reiterate our concerns about rail safety. I hope that the leader of the third party will be working with us on that very important file.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the Liberals have tried ignoring this scandal. They've tried slinging mud at everybody else. They've tried to change the channel over and over again. But what they haven't done is take any responsibility or answer any questions.

The Premier is taking counsel from staff who are facing criminal investigations, while she refuses to answer simple questions, like who made the decisions in the Sudbury bribery scandal. Does the Premier realize how bad this makes her look? Does she realize the damage that it does to her credibility and to the credibility of her government?

That's my question, Speaker: Does she realize the damage this is doing to her? If she does, why doesn't she just do the right thing and have those people step aside?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I will say that I understand this is a serious issue; I take it very seriously. I have said repeatedly that I will work with the authorities. I have answered over and over again the questions that have been put to me in this House.

But I am also very, very clear that the investigation is taking place outside of this House. The authorities are not here. They are not asking the questions in this House. Those questions are being asked elsewhere. They are being asked as part of the independent external investigation. That is as it should be, and that is the investigation we will take part in.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question is for the Premier. The gas plant scandal had the deputy chief of staff and senior Liberal operatives caught in the OPP's radar. The same is true in your Sudbury bribery scandal. It will be the taped words of your deputy and Liberal operative that will be your undoing.

You have stated that you made the decision to appoint your Sudbury candidate in late November, but it seems nobody knew. On December 12, Pat Sorbara told Andrew Olivier that you were "going to" be making your decision. According to your own deputy, you hadn't yet made your decision. The tape doesn't lie. Will you admit that your version and the version found on tape are vastly different?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I will say to the member opposite that there's an investigation going on outside of this House. Much as he would like to be running the investigation, it's not happening.

His House leader said on February 27 that it was a good idea to "stop interfering in an ongoing investigation, and let it run its course." So that's what we're going to do. We're going to let the investigation take place outside of this House.

In the meantime, we are going to carry on the very, very important work of building this province up, of making sure that we work and partner with business, that we provide the home care that people need in their homes, and that we put in place the policies that will keep young women and girls safe and will work to change the culture of sexual assault and violence—and that, Mr. Speaker, in respect of International Women's Day yesterday.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Again to the Premier: This is just like the gas plant scandal, where Liberal operatives said one thing, but recovered emails clearly laid out the truth. This time, it's your operatives' words that were caught on tape.

Gerry Lougheed had quite a chat with Andrew Olivier on December 11. He talked about what would happen if Olivier said no to his job offer and instead went out and

sold Liberal memberships. He left the door open for Olivier to run. According to your Liberal operative, you hadn't yet made your decision.

You have been snared by your own story. So which is it, Premier: your version, or the one caught on tape?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I will say very clearly, and I've said this many times—

Mr. John Yakabuski: No Watergate gap in these tapes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —that I made a decision that Glenn Thibeault would be the best candidate for us in Sudbury, after my meeting with him at the end of November. I've said that clearly.

I do take this matter very seriously, but I've said that I will work with the authorities outside of this House. That's where the investigation is taking place, and that's where it rightly should take place, because it is an independent investigation. It's not an investigation that is taking place in the Legislature. It's not a political investigation, Mr. Speaker; it's an independent investigation that's happening outside the Legislature.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. The Premier said she wanted to keep a young man involved, and that's why Andrew Olivier was offered a job in exchange for getting out of the Premier's way. But the crimes that the OPP are investigating just don't get excused away. Is the Premier ready to stop offering excuses and start offering explanations?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to go back to a moment on February 27 when this very member made a statement, and he said that "you do have a larger responsibility to make sure you're careful in the use of your words so you don't interfere in any ... way."

That was the member from Timmins-James Bay, so I know that he understands why it's important that we let the investigation take place with the authorities outside of this Legislature. But I just wanted to remind him of that, because he did say that on February 27, so he will then understand better why my answer is, once again, we'll work with the authorities outside of this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Back to the Premier: Those comments were about you, Premier, by the way.

The Premier is a grandmother; I'm a grandfather. The Premier has heard a lot of excuses; I've heard a lot of excuses. As any parent or grandparent knows, excuses don't cut it. That's especially true of the law. Excuses don't make it okay to break the Criminal Code or to violate the Election Act.

Will the Premier stop making excuses and instead start giving answers to important questions like who made the decision to offer Andrew Olivier a job?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just say once again that I will co-operate with the authorities. The investigation is taking place outside of this House.

But to the quote that the member opposite made, he said, and again I'll just read it into the record: "You do have a larger responsibility to make sure you're careful in the use of your words so you don't interfere in any ... way." I know—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I wouldn't have stopped the clock, except there was some bantering back and forth from people at the other side. I'm going to ask that that stop so that I can focus on the answer.

Please.

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the member opposite was addressing that to me, Mr. Speaker. But the fact is there's a principle in that statement and the principle is that interference should not come from us, that we should let the authorities do their work and let the investigation unfold. That's the principle of which I wanted to remind the member opposite.

RAIL SAFETY

Mr. John Fraser: My question is to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. On Saturday, 38 cars from a CN train derailed about two kilometres west of Gogama near the Minakwa River. While thankfully no one was hurt, a number of the cars carrying crude oil caught fire, the rail bridge over the Minakwa River collapsed and two of the cars ended up in the river itself.

This was the second derailment in the area in less than a month. In both cases the resulting plume of smoke could be seen for miles around. People in the community are concerned about the impacts these derailments are having on their air and drinking water, and, quite frankly, they're concerned about the federal rail safety regulations that are supposed to protect them.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change: Could he please provide an update to the House on the situation in Gogama?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'm very glad to get a question that Ontarians care about. It's very timely and important to so many folks. First of all, I want to thank the citizens and local government in Gogama and the Greater Sudbury area as well as the First Nations who are working so closely with our officials. I want to thank the staff at MOECC, in the federal environment ministry, my colleagues at natural resources and forestry, our OPP, the fire marshal and, particularly, the Sudbury and District Health Unit for the excellent work they're doing to protect our citizens, because the safety of Ontarians is very much our first priority.

This horrifying crash, as my parliamentary assistant, the member for Sudbury, has pointed out, really has to draw attention to the need for greater federal government action to protect our communities and our environment.

I'm happy to report to the House that containment measures are in place in the Minakwa River. Vacuum trucks are on site to pull as much out as possible. We're taking water samples in a number of areas and monitoring air—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. John Fraser: I want to thank the minister for providing us with the update on the situation in Gogama. I know I speak for every member of this House when I say that we are very relieved that no one was injured in this horrific incident. It is clear that the federal government needs to do more to improve rail safety to better protect our citizens, communities and the environment. The rail cars involved were new models compliant with the latest regulations, yet still we have this situation.

Could the minister please inform members of this House on what the government is doing to call on the federal government to improve rail safety in Ontario after Saturday's incident?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by thanking the member from Ottawa South for this very important question. Saturday's train derailment is, of course, very concerning to our government. As the member mentioned, the transportation of dangerous goods, including oil, is the responsibility of the federal government. I want to assure members of this House that I will be contacting the federal transport minister, Lisa Raitt, as well as representatives from both CN and CP this week to reiterate our government's serious concerns with respect to rail safety.

Rail safety has always been a top priority in our discussions with our federal counterparts over the last number of years. We need to do everything that we can to ensure that another incident like this does not happen in the future. I know my counterparts in the government of Quebec have also been very outspoken and very active on this important file as well.

We will continue to advocate on behalf of all Ontarians on this important issue to ensure the safety of all of those living in this incredible province.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is to the Premier and it's about the Sudbury by-election. Instead of creating a culture which respects and adheres to the spirit and letter of the elections law, the Premier has created a win-at-all-costs culture in her office, even if that means cheating. That was her first mistake.

Then she either delegated too much authority to her Machiavellian staff in political operatives or she signed off on the plan to offer an enticement to Mr. Olivier to get him to stand down as a candidate, or worse, she ordered her staff to make the offer, which can only be called a bribe or a breach of Ontario's election law. That was her second mistake.

The Premier has a responsibility to uphold the integrity of her office. When will she demand the resignations of Ms. Sorbara and Mr. Loughheed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite continue to want to run an investigation here in the Legislature. This is not where the investigation can take place. It actually has to take place outside of the Legislature. It's independent. I think it's very important that we take the responsibility not to interfere with that investigation.

I say to the member opposite again: I will work with the authorities, but I will work with them, Mr. Speaker, where they are doing their work and where the investigation is taking place, outside of the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: This is a channel that the Premier cannot change. In order to maintain the public's confidence and trust while these two police investigations continue to unfold, the Premier needs to demand the resignations of Ms. Sorbara and Mr. Loughheed. So far, she has steadfastly refused to do so. This is her third mistake when it comes to the Sudbury by-election.

By stating in this House that she believes Ms. Sorbara won't be charged, the Premier has interfered in and possibly compromised the ongoing police investigations—the fourth mistake, because parliamentary democracy requires a clear separation between the legislative branch and the judiciary.

The Sudbury by-election scandal is one that the Premier can't blame on her predecessor or his people. When is she going to take personal responsibility for her role in this and demand the resignations of Sorbara and Loughheed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I've made a public statement. I've been very clear about my decision in terms of who the candidate in Sudbury would be, Mr. Speaker. But the fact is, if the member opposite is really concerned about the separation of what goes on in this House and what happens in terms of independent process, then he will understand exactly why I answer this question in the way that I do, which is that it is very important that I not interfere and that the authorities are allowed to run the investigation and let it unfold.

But the fact is that at the same time there is other work that needs to be done, and that's the work of government. That is the work where we make sure, for example, that there are responses to incidents like what just happened in Gogama this weekend. It's very important that we be able to do all of those things at the same time.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. Pat Sorbara said that there were others who were pushed out of the way by the Premier herself and possibly offered bribes. Who are those others?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, the investigation is taking place outside of this House, and we'll work with the authorities as that investigation unfolds.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The Liberals have refused to answer this question even though they have insisted that they have done nothing wrong. If they're not telling the whole story, there could be two other bribery investigations out there. In fact, there could be two other criminal investigations.

Will the Premier tell Ontarians who Pat Sorbara was referring to when she told Andrew Olivier on tape that the Premier had personally made at least two other calls to two other people making the same offer as she did to Andrew Olivier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: As the Premier has said over and over again, this is a matter that is being dealt with outside of this Legislature. We should respect all authorities in terms of the work that they're doing. It would be highly inappropriate for anyone in this House to comment on an ongoing investigation. I respect the Premier for taking a principled approach in this regard, and I suggest to the members opposite that they should do the same thing.

It's clear that the NDP is trying to continue to talk about this issue as opposed to real issues because they have a dismal record when it comes to defending progressive issues in this province. They have abandoned anything progressive when it comes to making sure that Ontarians' interests are represented. I just quote Carol Goar in the Toronto Star when she wrote that Andrea Horwath "triggered the election by rejecting the most progressive provincial budget in decades, one that would have raised the minimum wage, increased the Ontario Child Benefit, improved welfare rates, and provided more support to people with disabilities."

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. On Friday, the Premier released It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment. This is a package of initiatives to help change attitudes, improve supports for survivors who come forward about abuse, and make workplaces and campuses safer and more responsive to complaints about sexual violence and harassment.

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We know that one in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in her lifetime. This government has recognized that this is unacceptable. This is a societal problem that has been in the shadows and not talked about for far too long.

Minister, can you please provide this House with an update of the actions that the government has taken to support victims of sexual violence and harassment?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much to the member for Halton for this very important question.

The Premier's announcement last week is the latest in our government's commitment to address the needs of victims of sexual and domestic violence.

As a government—contrary to what was stated by the third party earlier today—we have increased funding by 51% since 2003 for violence against women services. In 2013-14, our government spent \$145 million in this sector. This includes funding for over 2,000 shelter beds for women and their children escaping domestic violence, counselling services for women and children, crisis telephone counselling, as well as local referral services for housing and other supports.

In the 2014 budget, we invested an additional \$14.5 million over the next three years to provide funding to the hard-working front-line workers at the agencies that serve the violence against women sector.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Thank you, Minister, for outlining the very real work that this government and your ministry has been doing.

As we continue to better comprehend the complex issue of sexual violence and harassment, we have gained an understanding around victims and perpetrators, learning more about those who are at risk of suffering abuse and also realizing how pervasive sexual harassment continues to be in our society. It is a deep-rooted problem. It crosses all social boundaries. It is experienced by women, girls, men and boys of every age and culture. It can occur at any time, anywhere, any place. It is a crime.

This government has recognized that to tackle sexual violence and harassment, there needs to be a comprehensive plan, a plan to change behaviours and challenge social norms.

Mr. Speaker, in every workplace, every campus, every community and every context, we can and must do better. Tell us about the prevalence, Minister.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Indeed the prevalence of sexual violence and harassment throughout our society is unacceptable. For example, statistics show that women with a disability are three times as likely to be forced into sexual activity by use of threats or force.

Through our government's new action plan, we're doing our part to establish an Ontario where everyone is free from the threat, fear or experience of sexual violence and harassment.

As part of this action plan, my ministry will be enhancing the focus and action of our 48 domestic violence community coordinating committees on sexual violence awareness. My ministry will also be exploring the use of community hubs to offer services like sexual assault centres, public health units and legal aid offices in one location to address the barriers women face in accessing services.

Mr. Speaker, our government agrees with the member that in every workplace, every campus, every community, we can and must do better.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Julia Munro: My question is to the Premier. The Chief Electoral Officer's report confirms what we

have always suspected: that the Ontario Liberal Party will do just about anything to win a by-election.

Alleged attempts to bribe the Liberal candidate have sullied the democratic process. Now, the Premier's refusal to do the honourable thing and remove Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed Jr. from their public positions has sullied the dignity of the office she holds.

Premier, did your zeal for winning the Sudbury by-election also extend to making promises to the Sudbury voters that you had no intention of keeping?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me first of all just say that I think that to second guess the democratic process which took place in Sudbury—the people of Sudbury had all the information. They made a decision. They sent Glenn Thiibeault to Queen's Park as the MPP for Sudbury, and they made a decision. I respect that decision that they made.

To the point of what the Chief Electoral Officer has actually said, Mr. Speaker, let me just say again that the Chief Electoral Officer clearly stated, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges." That's what the Chief Electoral Officer said in his report, and there is an investigation going on outside of this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Julia Munro: Again to the Premier: The member from Sudbury said, "Everyone in the north knows someone who has been affected by an accident on the highway." We're talking about Highway 69.

The Highway 69 project, which the Premier promised throughout the Sudbury by-election, is, surprisingly, not a priority, now that the campaign is over. After years of promising its timely completion, we see it delayed for yet another four years. This is just another example of the Liberals saying one thing and doing another, to get votes.

Premier, the first question—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Sorry for interrupting. I have to bring someone in your own caucus to attention so that I can hear the question.

The interjections of everyone else: I am listening carefully. There was a reference, and I will let you finish the question, making sure that it is germane to the first question.

Mrs. Julia Munro: Premier, the first question I asked you was about integrity. Last week I asked you about unprecedented irregularities. Now I ask you: How good is your word?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm very happy that the member opposite asked a question regarding the four-laning of Highway 69.

Last Friday I had the opportunity to be in a community just south of Sudbury, standing alongside my colleague and good friend the member from Sudbury, to update the community with respect to where we stand.

It's important to recognize that there has been extraordinary progress on this particular project, thanks to the leadership over the last decade—and more—of this government. In fact, of the 20 kilometres that are currently under construction on Highway 69 with respect to the four-laning, nine kilometres will be paved and in operation this coming summer. An additional 11 kilometres will be paved and operating next summer. We've already completed 50 kilometres of this project.

There is more work to do, but what's most important for this Premier and our government is to make sure that we get it right so that the benefits of four-laning Highway 69 flow to everybody, including our First Nations partners. That's why we're going to make sure this project gets completed—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Start the clock.

New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Premier. On February 20, it was reported that the federal Liberal Party would have nothing to do with Gerry Lougheed or Pat Sorbara during the upcoming election. The federal Liberals obviously realize something that the Premier is ignoring: that bribery scandals are bad for business, and they're bad for democracy.

The federal Liberals also suggest Gerry Lougheed won't be holding any fundraisers for them. Will the Premier or her party be accepting any money from Gerry Lougheed while he is under police investigation?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As I said, I've been trying to listen carefully, and I know this weaves in and out. Make sure that the member brings this to government policy in the supplementary.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, I restate what the Premier has said clearly, that there is an ongoing investigation that is taking place outside this House. It would be highly inappropriate for any member of the government to comment on that investigation.

We should respect the process and come back down to the issues that are important to people, issues like making sure that we have retirement income security for hard-working Ontarians who do not have a pension plan; or making sure that we are investing in our infrastructure, most importantly public transit and public transportation infrastructure.

Clearly, the NDP have no positions on these issues. They have abandoned these important issues. They do not want to talk about those issues. This is their strategy to deflect. This is something they've been doing since

last year, and we've seen the results of the last election, where people elected a Liberal majority government.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Cindy Forster: On December 12, Gerry Loughheed met with Andrew Olivier, on behalf of the Premier, to offer him a job. Since then, the Sudbury police services board has met three times. But in nearly three months, the Premier has yet to remove Gerry Loughheed from the Sudbury police services board. Gerry Loughheed has been making decisions that affect law enforcement in Sudbury, all the while facing a criminal investigation. Anyone can see that's not right.

Will the Premier sign an order in council today to remove Gerry Loughheed, a Liberal nominee to the board, from the Sudbury police services board?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, as I have spoken on this issue before, I think the member opposite very much knows that the boards are made up of both municipal appointees and provincial appointees, and there is a code of conduct by which boards must abide. If boards have any issue, they can refer that matter to the Ontario Civilian Police Commission. In this case, I think we know that the police services board in Sudbury has done so.

Speaker, this just goes to highlight again how the NDP does not want to talk about real issues. This is something they've been suffering from for over a year.

I want to highlight what Martin Regg Cohn said in the Toronto Star:

"Andrea Horwath, meet Stephen Harper—your new best friend and fellow traveller...."

"As leader of Ontario's NDP, Horwath has made a stunning about-face on pensions—betraying the middle class, working class, and everyone in between...."

"Under Horwath, the NDP is no longer activist but obstructionist."

REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY

Mr. Bob Delaney: This question is for the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Ontario's real estate sector contributes billions annually to our economy, and it supplies the livelihood for some 57,000 people in our province.

Today in the House, we're joined by many of the members of the real estate community and business-people from many of our Ontario communities.

All of our communities depend on an ongoing and respectful relationship between home purchasers and realtors, whether realtors are part of larger brokerages or whether they're independent agents.

The Ministry of Government and Consumer Services has identified real estate modernization as a priority. I'd like the minister to explain the measures that Ontario is taking to help ensure a competitive real estate environment that allows for successful business operations and a fair market for consumers.

Hon. David Orazietti: I want to thank the member from Mississauga–Streetsville for this important question. I'd also like to welcome the Ontario Real Estate Association here to the gallery and encourage members to stop by their reception later today.

The purchase of a home is a significant milestone for many Ontarians, and I'm pleased with the steps that our government has taken to simplify this process. Our Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act makes the real estate market more open and transparent as well as affordable. We've improved real estate transactions by allowing for more appropriate billing and fee options. This reform increases flexibility for homebuyers and sellers to negotiate charges and services with their professionals. We've taken steps to eliminate phantom offers, which inflate prices and undermine transparency. The act requires realtors to provide offers in writing, and this regulation was based on extensive consultations with the sector and received the full support of OREA.

I appreciate the contributions that those who work in the real estate industry make, and I look forward to continuing to work with them, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Minister, the purchase of a home can be a stressful experience. It's the biggest purchase that most families ever make. Our government needs to explore every opportunity to make the process more efficient and easier for individuals and families. Consumers need to ensure the business environment is fair and transparent, and that the interests of the homebuyer and seller are protected.

I know our government has also worked to support an efficient real estate environment by allowing electronic signatures. Members of the real estate industry support this change. My question asks you to confirm that the province will be moving forward with it. Would the minister please inform the House how the Electronic Commerce Act is making the sale and purchase of real estate easier and more efficient for the people of Ontario and for homebuyers and home sellers?

Hon. David Orazietti: Thank you, once again, to the member from Mississauga–Streetsville.

Ontario's 2013 amendments to the Electronic Commerce Act will allow people to electronically sign paperwork and email it to their real estate agent. The act will support the reliability of electronic signatures on agreements of purchase and sale of land by stipulating that e-signatures must be: reliable, for the purpose of identifying the person who signs the document; permanent; and accessible by people who are entitled to view it.

We're now reviewing the submissions made to the ministry during the consultation period to develop proactive measures and ensure that these amendments will increase efficiency without increasing the risk of fraud.

Our government is committed to an efficient, competitive real estate environment and looks forward to continued engagement with the real estate sector on this matter.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is for the Premier. Is the Premier returning?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. The tradition is a courtesy in terms of attendance one way or the other. We do not make reference to people's absence. If you would put the question to someone else, we'd appreciate that very much.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's not my position to debate the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke. It doesn't matter.

Put your question, please.

Mr. Norm Miller: Thank you for that explanation, Mr. Speaker. I'll address my question to the Deputy Premier, then.

Nearly every time you and the Premier rise in this Legislature, you tell us that you're taking the Sudbury by-election issue seriously. Deputy Premier, you are taking this just about as seriously as you did the actions of Laura Miller and Peter Faist. You let them fly across the country to avoid accountability. Now, you continue to let Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed avoid accountability for their actions that were found to be in direct contravention of the Election Act.

Deputy Premier, will today be the day you finally hold these individuals accountable?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We do take this very, very seriously. The Premier has spoken to it repeatedly, both in this House and outside of this House.

I think the question is: Where should the investigation take place? I don't think there's any question that the investigation should take place outside of this House. It is important that it's independent of this Legislature and takes place outside the Legislature.

Elections Ontario determined that the allegations against the member from Sudbury and the Premier were baseless. Nonetheless, they will continue to co-operate fully. The Chief Electoral Officer clearly stated, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence." That's a very important statement: I am not determining anyone's guilt or innocence.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Perhaps if the government started answering some of these simple questions, the questions wouldn't get asked anymore.

Again to the Deputy Premier: As we continue to wait for four OPP investigations to conclude, we can only worry what might be next. With your lack of action so far, how can we believe that you're serious about making your government more accountable?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think we've received some very good advice from members of the opposition. We agreed when the PC House leader said a week or two

ago, "Stop interfering in an ongoing investigation, and let it run its course."

When asked about a charge laid against a PC staff member, the PC member from Whitby–Oshawa said, "I really don't have a comment ... because it's before the courts." She repeated this sentiment on CP24 when she said, "I'm leaving it in the hands of the police and the justice system to continue their investigation and I'm confident that they will reach the right conclusion."

We agree with the House leader. We agree with the member from Whitby–Oshawa.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Miss Monique Taylor: Just over a year ago, the Premier stood up and said, "I am the change"—sorry, this is to the Deputy Premier. It seems a bit odd because before the Premier was sworn in, the Liberal government was facing police investigations, and since the Premier was sworn in, the Liberal government is facing even more police investigations.

The culture of arrogance doesn't seem to have changed at all. Will the Deputy Premier ensure that the Premier will keep to her promise and make change by telling Ontarians who was making the decisions in the Sudbury bribery scandal?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

1150

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I'll be very happy to answer this question. I remind the NDP what they campaigned on. They campaigned on voting against increases to the minimum wage. They voted against increasing the salaries for hard-working personal support workers. In fact, they campaigned on voting against the hard-working child care workers. They've campaigned to vote against providing additional funding for people with intellectual disabilities. That's the party that claims to be progressive but has voted against one of the most progressive budgets—not once, but twice.

One of the reasons the NDP are spending all this time talking about anything else but real issues, like the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, is because they have no policies, because they do not believe in progressive policies. We're not the only ones saying this, Speaker. The people of Ontario passed their judgment in June, and they elected a Liberal majority government.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: Less than a year ago, the Premier promised Ontarians she would "work each and every day to keep your trust...." But instead of trust, the behaviour of the Liberals is making people more cynical. Instead of answering questions about the Sudbury bribery scandal, the Premier is dodging, hiding and trying to distract people.

An editorial published says that in spite of well over 100 questions about the Sudbury bribery scandal, the Liberals have directly answered only one single question—that's less than 1%.

Will the Premier start making good on her promise and keep Ontarians' trust by answering a simple question: Who told Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed to offer Andrew Olivier a job?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Clearly, the NDP has no tangible issues or policies left to talk about. Clearly, they have nothing left for them to go back to their party members and say, "This is what we stand for." Again and again, they have demonstrated that they stand for nothing.

In fact, if anybody, they're really aligned with the Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, when it comes to issues on retirement income security. This is what Martin Regg Cohn had to say in the *Toronto Star*: "Andrea Horwath, meet Stephen Harper—your new best friend and fellow traveller...."

"As leader of Ontario's NDP, Horwath has made a stunning about-face on pensions—betraying the middle class, working class, and everyone in between."

Speaker, he goes on to conclude in this column: "Under Horwath, the NDP is no longer activist but obstructionist. Not progressive, but reactionary."

"The Prime Minister would be proud."

Shame on them, Speaker.

ORGAN DONATION

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question this morning is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Interjection: A great minister.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: A great minister; that's right.

There are many Ontarians who have loved ones requiring an organ which would save their life. Every day, hundreds of Ontarians wait for the gift of life. Sadly, I have even heard from constituents in my riding of Davenport who are enduring this excruciating wait themselves or for a loved one.

Demand for organ transplantation is increasing due to technological and pharmacological advances, the aging population, and increasing incidence of end-stage organ disease.

Organ donation is a critical part of our world-leading health system. Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Tell us about our government's organ and tissue donation and transplant system, and how our government plans on addressing the increasing demands for organ transplantation.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I thank the member from Davenport for this important question.

Our government developed the organ and tissue donation and transplant system to address three main goals: to maximize organ donations to increase organ transplants and to reduce the wait times for organ transplantation; and also to support an effective, efficient and accountable organ and tissue donation and transplantation system; and thirdly, to meet the need for safe and high-quality tissue for transplantation in Ontario.

Our organ and tissue donation and transplant system is highly effective. It consists of 56 designated hospitals in

the donation infrastructure system, 21 of which are hospitals that provide neurosurgical or trauma services.

I want to take this opportunity to thank our hard-working health care professionals for their work in our organ and tissue donation and transplant system.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care for his work with Ontario's organ and tissue donation and transplant system.

I would like to direct the second part of my question to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

As the minister responsible for ServiceOntario, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services plays an important role in promoting awareness of the need for more Ontarians to become donors.

While I'm encouraged by the increasing number of organ donors, I understand that many Ontarians are still on waiting lists for life-saving or life-transforming transplants. I appreciate the work of our health care professionals, who have the skills and knowledge to perform medical miracles; but for them to save lives, Ontarians must donate.

As leaders, we must continue to educate the public about organ donation and register organ donors to continue helping our health care professionals save lives.

Minister, can you please share with us what ServiceOntario is doing to encourage organ donation and how Ontarians can become donors?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: To the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Hon. David Orazietti: I want to thank the member from Davenport for the supplementary question.

I'm certainly pleased with our initiatives in ServiceOntario, in partnership with the Trillium Gift of Life Network and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, to increase the number of organ and tissue donors in the province. Among our initiatives, we've launched an innovative, easy-to-access, online donor registration; we're ensuring staff at ServiceOntario centres ask customers about registering when they renew their driver's licences or Ontario photo cards; we're including donor consent forms and information brochures in our health card renewal or re-registration notices; and we're using social media to attract more donors. As a result of these initiatives, Speaker, over 3.1 million Ontarians have registered to donate. I am pleased to report that 2014 was a record-breaking year, with over 250,000 Ontarians registering. I'd like to recognize and thank the record number of Ontarians who are registering for this process.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Your Premier is having her credibility eroded on a daily basis, and I know you're bored with these questions about the Sudbury bribery scandal. So I put this to you, would you today—we'll help you—have Pat Sor-

bara step down until this investigation is completed and have Gerry Lougheed removed from the police services board until this investigation is completed? Then you'll be able to change that channel and move on to something that you find more exciting.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I certainly am grateful for the help of the member opposite. I do think there are other questions that citizens of Ontario would like to have raised in this House. The member opposite has already actually given us some good help.

Let me give you the advice that was given that we're taking. His House leader said, "Stop interfering in an ongoing investigation and let it run its course." So that's advice that he gave us, and that's advice that we are taking. But if that's not enough, the member from Whitby-Oshawa said, when asked about charges laid against a PC staff member, "I really don't have a comment to make on this, because it's before the court." Again, she gave us good advice; advice that we are taking. And she didn't just say it once. She said it again in a CP24 interview. She said, "I'm leaving it in the hands of the police and the justice system to continue their investigation. I'm confident they'll reach the right!"—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Deputy Premier, even the Premier's predecessor once stated, "It is never too late to do the right thing." I would ask the current Premier, and you in her stead today, to finally do the right thing. Your Premier spoke ad infinitum as she came to this House as the first elected female Premier in the province of Ontario—how things were going to be done differently; how she would be accountable, responsible and she would—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Beaches—East York, come to order.

Mr. John Yakabuski:—and integrity would not be in question in this House.

I give her this opportunity. Change this channel: Have Pat Sorbara step down until this investigation is complete; have Gerry Lougheed step down from the police services board until this investigation is complete.

Will you give the House and will you give the people of Ontario that today?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I said, you've given us good advice, and we're taking that advice. We're going to do exactly what the PC House leader said to do, and that is to "stop interfering in an ongoing investigation and let it run its course." We're grateful for that advice.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Forestry.

Hon. Bill Mauro: Speaker, I think you're referring to me; I'm not sure.

I'd like to introduce three students from Lakehead University in Thunder Bay who have joined us this mor-

ning: Baffa Yusuf, Ian McRae, and Roman Jakubowski. They're here with us in the members' gallery.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I'm sure the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change and the parliamentary assistant know full well that Gogama is my hometown—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1201 to 1300.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's my pleasure to introduce some very special guests who will be joining us momentarily from the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre in Etobicoke—Lakeshore: Mr. Kunga Tsering, former member of the Tibetan Parliament and co-chair of the Canadian Friends of Tibet; Mrs. Doma Tsoh, board member of the Canadian Friends of Tibet; and Mr. Thupten Wangyal, former president of the Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. Fife assumes ballot item number 45 and Ms. Forster assumes ballot item number 69.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

PALLIATIVE CARE TELETHON

Mr. Steve Clark: I rise to celebrate another remarkable example of the generosity and community spirit that makes Leeds—Grenville a great place to live. Last weekend our community dug deep to help the 30 Hour Telethon for Palliative Care Services at Brockville General Hospital and raised the bar to heights not seen in its 32 years.

Led by event chair Bruce Wylie, his incredible team of volunteers and some amazing entertainers who gave their time and their talent, the telethon raised a record \$250,582.

Applause.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you.

Bruce is the long-time host and chair of the event, and there wasn't a dry eye in the house when he announced

he was passing the torch as event chair. It was truly a case of going out on top.

It's great that Bruce will continue to host the telethon, which has raised nearly \$3 million over three decades. These funds ensure that BGH's cherished palliative care program is there to provide compassionate end-of-life care for patients and family support. Every penny of its \$575,000 annual budget is raised locally because the health ministry provides no funding.

I want to echo Bruce Wylie's passionate plea at the end of this year's telethon for that to change. He said that "people are going to support this telethon for as long as we need to support it, until we get a government that's willing to put some money into things that count. This is one of those things that count."

I wholeheartedly agree. Palliative care does count, and I hope that Minister Hoskins is listening to those words.

KIDNEY DISEASE

Miss Monique Taylor: I chose my statement today with a loved one in mind. One in 10 Canadians has kidney disease or failure. March is Kidney Month, with this Thursday, March 12, being World Kidney Day. Often, there are no symptoms of kidney disease until it is quite advanced and most kidney function is already lost. But early detection can be the difference between life and death.

Last year the Kidney Foundation of Canada introduced an online risk-assessment tool, a simple quiz that takes only a few minutes: 10 short questions that help people decide if they should be speaking to their doctor about kidney disease.

Let's not forget about just how important it is to become an organ donor. Life is precious, and as we know, many have been saved because they were able to receive an organ donated by someone who had recently passed. Quite certainly in the case of kidneys, live donors must match and are sometimes quite rare. For all organ donation, it is important that as many people as possible register to be a donor.

Again, you can do it online—it only takes a couple of minutes—at beadonor.ca. You can specify all the organs you want to donate, not just kidneys. One small step can save a life. In fact, it can save up to eight lives. At a time of tragic loss, that is quite a legacy to leave behind. So be a donor.

MODEL PARLIAMENT

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I rise to make a few observations about one of the many excellent youth programs that are offered here in the Legislature; that is, the Legislative Assembly's model Parliament.

Last week, I met up with two students attending this year's three-day event: Nick Barnes and Sebastian Scott from Kingston Collegiate and Vocational Institute in my riding of Kingston and the Islands.

This unique educational experience brings students from each riding to learn about the history of this institution and about legislative processes, through workshops and presentations.

I want to commend this program for encouraging our youth to participate in civic and community affairs and in political decision-making and governance. If we are saddened by the lack of democratic engagement of our youth—and we should be—then the model Parliament is one remedy.

I'd like to suggest another, Mr. Speaker. This House is a living repository of history—a museum of sorts. If I may be so bold, I would like to suggest that our main exhibit—question period—might be retrofitted to bring it up to modern standards. The harsh reality is that people of all ages are turned off by the antics, by the lack of decorum and by the lack of substantive discussion of the affairs that affect their lives. I have a friend in his eighties who, until last week's charades, watched every morning. He's no longer interested. When I worked in a constituency office for seven years, I heard similar comments all the time.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, we must not forget that threats to democracy come from within and from without.

TOM BRADISH

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, I'd like to say congratulations to a constituent of mine, Tom Bradish, who was inducted into the Middlesex agricultural hall of fame last week.

Tom was born in London and raised on the edge of the village of Glanworth, on his family farm. He attended Wheable Collegiate in London. Tom's parents, William and Jessie Bradish, had a dairy farm where William also bought and sold many Holsteins. Tom went to Guelph to pursue his diploma in agriculture from 1965 to 1967, and returned home to work on the farm. Tom and his wife, Helen, have two daughters, Cheri and Kelly, and a son, John.

Since 1961, Tom has been involved in growing vegetables for processing, including peas, green beans, squash and sweet corn. Along with the Fergusons and the Cuddys, he is one of the founding partners of Strathroy Foods, which later became Carriere Foods, which was then purchased by Bonduelle in 2007, which is a family-run business from France.

Now farming with his son, John, Tom's company, Glan-R-Vest, harvests approximately 20,000 acres of vegetables for Bonduelle's Ingersoll and Strathroy locations. The harvesting keeps 25 to 35 employees busy from mid-June to late October and stretches from Chatham to Tillsonburg, from north of Ilderton all the way down to Port Stanley.

Tom's agricultural involvement includes hosting the 1985 International Plowing Match, co-chairing the 2002 International Plowing Match tented city held in Middlesex, and in 2003 he was the vice-president of the world

plowing match at the experimental research farm in Guelph.

We are proud to have Tom in our riding. Agriculture is stronger because of people like Tom Bradish. We wish Tom all the best as he enjoys his induction into the hall of fame.

SKILLED TRADES

Ms. Jennifer K. French: This weekend, I celebrated International Women's Day and attended the Unifor national skilled trades council. I have decided to talk about both events—to talk about women and the workforce.

Speaker, we talk a lot about strengthening our province and our communities, but it's our workers and tradespeople who are the ones actually doing the physical work. They're literally building, shaping, fixing, crafting and strengthening our communities and our economy in a real way. Jobs in the trades and the manufacturing sector are good, solid, stable, well-paid jobs that allow people to contribute to their local economy, allow them to make plans and live with some predictability. We should be prioritizing these kinds of jobs, funding school programs and promoting apprenticeships for our kids and for our girls.

It's one of the many reasons I'm proud to be a New Democrat. New Democrats stand up for equity in the workplace, fight to tear through the glass ceiling, and demand equal pay for equal work.

At the skilled trades council, delegates discussed the importance of encouraging women leaders and involvement in the skilled trades. Yes, absolutely. Our girls need to see themselves reflected in the trades, and they never will if they can't get into them. We must promote career paths and apprenticeships that afford young workers the opportunity to earn while they learn.

If government really wanted to build a solid economy, they would invest in our kids, our girls and our workers.

New Democrats will continue to stand up to unfair policies and to stand up for workers, women and communities across Ontario.

1310

TIBETAN CANADIAN CULTURAL CENTRE

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: The Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre was established in my riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore on October 17, 2007.

On Saturday, February 21, the centre celebrated Tibetan lunar new year with their special guest, Dr. Andrew Bennett, ambassador for religious freedom, from the Office of Religious Freedom.

I'm pleased to say that, over the years, I've had the honour and privilege of being a guest on many special occasions at the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre—most recently, to mark the 25th anniversary of the Dalai Lama being presented with the Nobel Peace Prize. At that

event, I was also very happy to be on hand to help cut the ribbon on the centre's new kitchen, which was made possible thanks to a \$150,000 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation last year. This investment from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the subsequent kitchen renovation will support the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre's role of providing social, cultural and recreational programs for participants of all ages.

I am very proud to have the first and only Tibetan cultural centre in Canada right in my riding of Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

I also want to make mention of the 56th national Tibet uprising day taking place tomorrow, on March 10. Mr. Speaker, I know that this day is very important to my guests and to all Tibetans across Etobicoke-Lakeshore and Canada.

To my guests today and Tsering Tsomo, president of the Tibetan Canadian Cultural Centre, all of its members and all Tibetan Canadians in Etobicoke-Lakeshore: Lo Sar Bey Delek. I wish you prosperity and goodwill.

COMMONWEALTH DAY

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to speak today, on Commonwealth Day. I was pleased to join the Speaker and others from the various political parties to join together in recognizing Commonwealth Day.

The Commonwealth nations, while autonomous, share a rich history that has given them common values and economic, political and social strength.

This is an especially historic year, as we mark the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta, a revolutionary document that is considered to be the foundation for our system of common law. It certainly was a precursor to the Canadian political system of constitutional monarchy.

I'm looking forward to the second reading of my bill, the Magna Carta Day Act. If passed, June 15 of each year would be proclaimed as Magna Carta Day here in Ontario.

I hope that future generations will remember and celebrate our history and appreciate the origins of the freedoms that we enjoy here in our daily life in Canada as part of the Commonwealth.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

Mr. Bob Delaney: As travel season approaches, it's time for Ontario families to do an identity check. If you're planning to travel to the United States, you are going to need an updated passport. If yours has expired or has less than six months left until it expires, it's time to renew that passport.

Whether you travel in the United States or within Canada, outside Ontario, ensure that you have supplementary health coverage for everyone travelling.

Seniors need a special identity check, and their families have an important role to play. Ensure that every senior has an updated Ontario health card. Within a year,

the old, obsolete red-and-white card will have been phased out.

Too many seniors do not have any up-to-date government-issued ID. An expired Ontario driver's licence is not valid identification. Seniors who no longer drive should have an Ontario photo card. Their families need to assist by ensuring that seniors have valid identification cards.

As well, check each senior's and each family member's birth certificate. An old certificate of baptism needs to be upgraded to an official Ontario birth certificate if you were born here. You can do this online and/or by mail.

As our precious Ontario warm weather approaches, Speaker, it's time for all Ontarians to do an identity check.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mrs. Cristina Martins: As I'm sure many of you in the House know, yesterday, Sunday, March 8, marked the celebration of International Women's Day. Since 1914, this important occasion has been celebrating women around the world. This year's theme, set by the UN, was "Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity."

To pay tribute to this significant occasion, we have with us in the members' gallery nine fantastic Portuguese-Canadian women who have made significant contributions to our society across a variety of sectors.

Organized by Ana Ochoa, and in light of the Pan/Parapan American Games, a torch relay was initiated to commemorate International Women's Day. This torch was passed to 10 women who have made significant contributions to the Portuguese-Canadian community and to our province. The relay importantly highlights the contributions of women of Luso-Canadian origin across diverse sectors in our province.

All of these strong women deserve our unreserved praise in this Legislature this afternoon. They are as follows:

- Representing the financial sector is relay organizer Ana Ochoa;
- From education, Ana Paula Ribeiro;
- Angela Machado is here for the charitable sector;
- Representing cultural promotion is Rosa de Sousa;
- Katia Caramujo is representing youth and volunteering in the not-for-profit sector;
- Representing our community as a pioneer is Lucillia Simas;
- Suzanne Cunha, for community associations;
- The public service, Paula Medeiros; and
- Lisa Fara is representing the armed forces.

Lastly, the torch arrived at my office here at Queen's Park this morning, as I am the first Portuguese-Canadian woman elected in government to this Legislature.

Applause.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to host these incredible women here at Queen's Park, and I'd like to thank Ana Ochoa once again for this great initiative.

Ladies, stand up.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): She made them stand up faster than I stood up.

I thank all members for their statements. It's now time for petitions.

The member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, stand up really quickly.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sorry, sorry.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That threw me off so much, I couldn't help it. I've got to get back into routine proceedings.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HOUSING SERVICES CORPORATION ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA RESPONSABILISATION DE LA SOCIÉTÉ DES SERVICES DE LOGEMENT

Mr. Hardeman moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 74, An Act to amend the Housing Services Act, 2011 and the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 74, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2011 sur les services de logement et la Loi de 1996 sur la divulgation des traitements dans le secteur public.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: This bill will increase accountability and reduce the waste and misuse of affordable housing dollars. It amends the Housing Services Act, 2011, in the following ways:

First, section 150 is amended to permit the Auditor General to audit the accounts of the Housing Services Corp. and each of its subsidiaries.

Second, section 151 is amended so that members of the Housing Services Corp., such as service managers and local housing corporations, are not required to participate in any of the corporation's programs or activities. This will save social housing providers money by letting them purchase natural gas and insurance at the best price.

The bill also amends the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act, 1996, to specify that the Housing Services Corp. and each of its subsidiaries are employers for the purposes of the act, which means they will once again have to report salaries over \$100,000.

MICROBEAD ELIMINATION AND MONITORING ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ÉLIMINATION ET LE CONTRÔLE DES MICROBILLES

Mrs. Lalonde moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 75, An Act with respect to microbeads / Projet de loi 75, Loi concernant les microbilles.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

1320

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for an even shorter statement.

M^{me} Marie-France Lalonde: Merci, monsieur le Président. C'est un honneur pour moi de présenter aujourd'hui mon premier projet de loi.

The Microbead Elimination and Monitoring Act, 2015, will serve to ensure industry and manufacturers in the province are mindful of the use of synthetic plastic microbeads in their products and begin identifying alternatives. Microbeads are non-biodegradable, solid plastic particles measuring less than one millimetre in size that are used in cosmetics, soap or similar products.

In addition to ceasing production of microbeads, the bill will require the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change to undertake a microbeads monitoring study in the Great Lakes and publish the results on their website. I believe Ontario can and will be the first province in Canada to phase out microbeads to protect Ontarians and our wildlife today and in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before I move to motions, just a point to make: that you should be reading from just the explanatory notes of bills. If they are long, you condense them and we avoid any kind of complication of statements being made.

It is now time for motions.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items 37 and 42 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Naqvi moves that notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot items 37 and 42 be waived. Do we agree? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are progressive, degenerative diseases of the brain that cause thinking, memory and physical functioning to become seriously impaired;

"Whereas there is no known cause or cure for this devastating illness; and

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias also take their toll on hundreds of thousands of families and care partners; and

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias affect more than 200,000 Ontarians today, with an annual total economic burden rising to \$15.7 billion by 2020; and

"Whereas the cost related to the health care system is in the billions and only going to increase, at a time when our health care system is already facing enormous financial challenges; and

"Whereas there is work under way to address the need, but no coordinated or comprehensive approach to tackling the issues; and

"Whereas there is an urgent need to plan and raise awareness and understanding about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias for the sake of improving the quality of life of the people it touches;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To approve the development of a comprehensive Ontario dementia plan that would include the development of strategies in primary health care, in health promotion and prevention of illness, in community development, in building community capacity and care partner engagement, in caregiver support and investments in research."

I fully support this and will affix my signature and send it with page Fardin.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I have a petition here from people across Ontario to end the exploitation of unpaid interns.

"Whereas there are an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 unpaid internships in Canada each year, depriving young people of economic opportunity and potentially displacing paid workers; and

"Whereas unpaid internships perpetuate poorer labour market outcomes for marginalized groups and those who cannot afford to participate; and

"Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Labour is not adequately enforcing existing laws on unpaid internships;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Protecting Interns and Creating a Learning Economy Act, 2015, which:

"(1) extends basic protections under the Employment Standards Act (ESA) to those currently excluded;

"(2) requires that posters with information about interns' rights in Ontario be conspicuously displayed in the workplace;

"(3) requires that employers provide interns with written notice about conditions of work, length of employment, hours of work, and job description, to be submitted to the ministry to enable the collection of data on internships; and

"(4) creates a system to allow anonymous and third-party complaints about unpaid internships."

I wholeheartedly support this, affix my name and will send it with page Riley.

CREDIT UNIONS

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition that's addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario support our 1.3 million members across Ontario through loans to small businesses to start up, grow and create jobs, help families to buy homes and assist their communities with charitable investments and volunteering; and

"Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario want a level playing field so they can provide the same service to our members as other financial institutions and promote economic growth without relying on taxpayers' resources;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Support the strength and growth of credit unions to support the strength and growth of Ontario's economy and create jobs in three ways:

"—maintain current credit union provincial tax rates;

"—show confidence in Ontario credit unions by increasing credit union-funded deposit insurance limits to a minimum of \$250,000;

"—allow credit unions to diversify by allowing Ontario credit unions to own 100% of subsidiaries."

I agree with the petition, will affix my name, and give it to page Julie to bring forward.

WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have over 200 signatures in support of improved winter road maintenance. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the area maintenance contract system has failed Ontario drivers the past two winters;

"Whereas unsafe conditions led to the maintenance contractor being fined in the winter of 2013-14, as well as leading to a special investigation by the provincial Auditor General;

"Whereas the managed outsourcing system for winter roads maintenance, where the private contractor is responsible for maintenance, but MTO patrols the region and directs the contractor on the deployment of vehicles, sand and salt, has a proven track record for removing

snow and ensuring that Ontario's highways are safe for travellers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Ministry of Transportation take immediate action to improve the maintenance of winter roads based on the positive benefits of the previous delivery model, where MTO plays more of a role in directing the private contractor."

I support this petition.

LGBT CONVERSION THERAPY

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to read this for the first time in the House.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas in 2013 the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) removed transgender and gender non-conforming identities from the mental disorders category;

"Whereas LGBT youth face 14 times the risk of suicide compared to their heterosexual peers and 77% of trans respondents in an Ontario-based survey had seriously considered suicide with 45% having already attempted suicide;

"Whereas an Ontario study found that transgender youth aged 16-24 have a 93% lower suicide rate when they feel supported by their parents in the expression of their gender identity;

"Whereas LGBT conversion therapy seeks to prohibit gender and sexual orientation expression, has no professional standards or guidelines in how it is practised and is condemned by all major professional associations of health care providers; and

"Whereas Ontario's Ministry of Health currently funds LGBT conversion therapy through OHIP;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health immediately cease funding all known forms of conversion therapy."

It's my pleasure to affix my signature and give this to page Niko.

WATER FLUORIDATION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further petitions? The member for Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was starting to get worried for the follicly challenged.

I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

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"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I am proud to affix my signature to this petition and submit it to the Clerk.

LANDFILL

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here signed by a great many of my constituents.

"Whereas many of the resources of this planet are finite and are necessary to sustain both life and the quality of life for all future generations;

"Whereas the disposal of resources in landfills creates environmental hazards which will have significant human and financial costs for;

"Whereas all levels of government are elected to guarantee their constituents' physical, financial, emotional and mental well-being;

"Whereas the health risks to the community and watershed increase in direct relationship to the proximity of any landfill site;

"Whereas the placement of a landfill in a limestone quarry has been shown to be detrimental;

"Whereas the placement of a landfill in the headwaters of multiple highly vulnerable aquifers is detrimental;

"Whereas the county of Oxford has passed a resolution requesting a moratorium on landfill construction or approval;

"Therefore be it resolved that we, the undersigned, humbly petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To implement a moratorium in Oxford county on any future landfill construction or approval until such time as a full review of alternatives has been completed which would examine best practices in other jurisdictions around the world;

"That this review of alternatives would give special emphasis on (a) practices which involve the total recycling or composting of all products currently destined for

landfill sites in Ontario and (b) the production of goods which can efficiently and practically be recycled or reused so as to not require disposal in landfills."

I affix my signature as I agree with this petition, Mr. Speaker.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas emergency response workers (paramedics, police officers, and firefighters) confront traumatic events on a nearly daily basis to provide safety to the public; and

"Whereas many emergency response workers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of their work; and

"Whereas Bill 2 'An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder' sets out that if an emergency response worker suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, the disorder is presumed to be an occupational disease that occurred due to their employment as an emergency response worker, unless the contrary is shown;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to unanimously endorse and quickly pass Bill 2 'An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder'."

I couldn't agree with this more, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to affix my name to it and give it to Rachel to bring to the Clerk.

IMMIGRATION POLICY

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Ontario is a province of immigrants, representing over 200 countries and speaking more than 130 languages; and

"Whereas Ontario is the primary destination for newcomers to Ontario, receiving more immigrants than the combined total of most of Canada's provinces and territories; and

"Whereas Ontario is dependent on skilled immigrant labour to fill jobs, 2.5 million of which are estimated to be created in the next 10 years; and

"Whereas a stronger immigration partnership with the federal government will allow Ontario to work with employers and communities to assess labour force needs and bring in highly-skilled workers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, as soon as possible, Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act, 2014."

I fully support the petition, Mr. Speaker, and I give the petition to page Natalie.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s lack of leadership is forcing the closure of the South Bruce Grey Health Centre restorative care Chesley site; and

“Whereas it is ignoring evidence that the restorative care program has had major successes since its inception three years ago; and

“Whereas it has helped over 300 patients to increase their quality of life by helping them regain strength, balance and independence; and

“Whereas it has improved patient outcomes for over 80% of patients who returned home feeling confident of their recovery; and

“Whereas the loss of this critical care will see patients readmitted to hospitals, emergency room visits or having to stay in acute care beds longer, representing the costliest options in our health care system; and

“Whereas vulnerable seniors in our communities take the position that there is evidence of funding cuts for home care services; and

“Whereas our senior and all other vulnerable patients deserve access to compassionate care and treatment as close to home as possible;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To provide the necessary base funding to keep the South Bruce Grey Health Centre restorative care Chesley site in operation so that the health and welfare of our most vulnerable patients remains intact.”

I fully support it, will affix my signature and send it with my buddy Dhairyaa.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: This is a petition to the Legislature of Ontario.

“Whereas the community of Windsor–Essex county has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada resulting in stressful lives and financial inadequacies for many of its residents and businesses; and

“Whereas recently the Ford Motor Company was considering Windsor, Ontario, as a potential site for a new global engine that would create 1,000 new jobs (and as many as 7,000 spin-off jobs) for our community; and

“Whereas partnership with government was critical to secure this investment from Ford; and

“Whereas the inability of Ford and the Ontario [government] to come to an agreement for partnership contributed to the loss of this project;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To insist that the Ontario government exhaust all available opportunities to reopen the discussions around the Ford investment in Windsor and to develop a national

auto strategy and review current policy meant to attract investment in the auto sector.”

I support this petition, and I will sign it and give it to you, page Riley.

DISTRACTED DRIVING

Ms. Soo Wong: I have a petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario government is committed to ensuring the safety of drivers, passengers and pedestrians on Ontario’s roads and making the province North America’s most cycling friendly jurisdiction; and

“Whereas, on average, one person is killed on Ontario’s roads every 18 hours, and one person is injured every 8.1 minutes; and

“Whereas drivers who use cellphones while driving are four times more likely to be in a crash than non-distracted drivers; and

“Whereas evidence has shown that Ontario’s impaired driving laws need to be strengthened to apply sanctions for driving under the influence of alcohol to those impaired by drugs;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario pass and enact, as soon as possible, Bill 31, the Making Ontario’s Roads Safer act, 2014.”

I fully support the petition. I give my petition to Inaya.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Green Energy Act has driven up the cost of electricity in Ontario due to unrealistic subsidies for certain energy sources, including the world’s highest subsidies for solar power; and

“Whereas this cost is passed on to ratepayers through the global adjustment, which can account for almost half of a ratepayer’s hydro bill; and

“Whereas the high cost of energy is severely impacting the quality of life of Ontario’s residents, especially fixed-income seniors; and

“Whereas it is imperative to remedy Liberal mismanagement in the energy sector by implementing immediate reforms detailed in the Ontario PC white paper Paths to Prosperity—Affordable Energy;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To immediately repeal the Green Energy Act, 2009, and all other statutes that artificially inflate the cost of electricity with the aim of bringing down electricity rates and abolishing expensive surcharges such as the global adjustment and debt retirement charges.”

I fully support it, will affix my signature and send it with page Morgan.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time we have available this afternoon for petitions.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INTERIM SUPPLY

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that the Minister of Finance be authorized to pay the salaries of the civil servants and other necessary payments pending the voting of supply for the period commencing April 1, 2015, and ending on September 30, 2015, such payments to be charged to the proper appropriation for the 2015-16 fiscal year, following the voting of supply.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I look to the minister to lead off debate.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I very much appreciate you giving me the opportunity to rise today to move the motion on interim supply.

1340

I would like to remind members of this Legislature and, of course, viewers at home that this motion is both routine and important. It is routine in the sense that the government seeks interim spending authority from the Legislature before the beginning of every fiscal year. This motion is important because it would provide temporary spending authority to make payments for all government ministries and offices as well as legislative offices after the new fiscal year starts on April 1.

Essentially, it would ensure that the government has the ability to continue to make important investments in programs and services that Ontarians rely on. That includes spending on important priorities including health care, education, supporting our most vulnerable citizens and, of course, growing the economy.

Speaker, I will take a moment to highlight a few points about the interim supply motion. Firstly, the spending authority is temporary. It would cover a period of six months from April 1, 2015, through September 30, 2015. This temporary spending authority is necessary to allow the government to operate while the Legislature conducts its review of the government's detailed spending plans through the work of the Standing Committee on Estimates. All expenditures incurred under the authority of this motion would be consistent with the upcoming 2015 budget and 2015-16 estimates, and these expenses would eventually be authorized in the Supply Act for the 2015-16 fiscal year.

The interim supply motion means that government would be able to keep our long-term-care homes, hospitals and schools running. In short, it means the government would be able to continue to provide essential public services province-wide and support the quality of life of all Ontarians, who we work for every single day.

I look forward to hearing from my colleague the parliamentary assistant for the Treasury Board secretar-

iat, the member from Etobicoke Centre, as well as from members of the opposition on this important, yet administrative, matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I want to speak for the next 10 minutes on this chapter. I'm going to start with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce because they have released two papers. The first is called *A Straightforward Guide to Ontario's Debt and Deficit*. It's called *How Bad Is It?* That's the title of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce document. The fact that they've had to entitle a document *How Bad Is It?* should quickly tell you: It's bad.

Ontario's current fiscal situation is revealed in this document that talks about how the province ended up so deep in debt. It starts off by saying in the last fiscal year, "the government of Ontario spent \$10.5 billion more than it collected in revenue." Speaker, that's up from \$9.2 billion the year before and it's going to be surpassed in this year's budget. "This deficit will increase the province's net debt to \$267.2 billion. To service this debt, Ontario will pay \$10.6 billion in interest payments," or interest on the debt.

We have the highest net debt of any province in Canada. The Auditor General told us recently that the individual amount of money that each Ontarian owes is over \$20,000 and it will hit \$24,000 in the next two years.

The chamber of commerce not only produced a document called *How Bad Is It?*; they only recently came out with their annual *Emerging Stronger* document to talk about Ontario's path from recovery to growth. But our path has veered in a terrible trajectory this year.

In a global context, their 60,000 members were asked, "Do you believe the Ontario economy is going in the right direction or the wrong direction?" Here is how many thought the economy was going in the right direction: In 2012, it was 41%; in 2013, it grew to 42%; but last year, it tumbled to 29%. That's how many people in the chamber of commerce membership think the economy is headed in the right direction.

The next question they asked was, "How confident are you in the Ontario economy right now?" Again, three years ago, it was 44%; two years ago, it grew to 48%; and this year it tumbled. The business community's confidence tumbled again, from 48% to 29%. It is very, very serious, when you've got these kinds of numbers coming out from the job creators in Ontario.

Now, sadly, there were 2,700 fewer businesses in Ontario last year than the year before, and we can look directly to a couple of areas why. Number one, we have the highest industrial power rates in all of North America. Number two, we have the highest payroll taxes in Canada. Nobody disputes that; those are facts.

Let's look at some of the statistics from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and what they're talking about in terms of, "How supportive are you of the commitments that political party leaders make during the election campaigns?" What they're asking them is,

"What are the most important issues to you right now?" The number one issue for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business was red tape. Of their members, 94% believe that red tape is the number one issue.

The number two issue—at 93%, a close second—was energy costs. No surprise when you've got 2,700 fewer businesses: companies like Wrigley, General Mills, Kellogg's, Caterpillar and Heinz all leaving Ontario. They still make chewing gum, they still make baking products, they still make cereal, they still make earth-moving equipment, they still make ketchup—just not necessarily here.

The third most important issue was balancing the budget by 2017-18, at 91%; paying down government debt, 91%. The list from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business goes on and on.

With respect to the main cost pressures on business, they're asked, "What input costs are causing difficulties for your business?" Here again, tax and regulatory costs are the number one issue—red tape. The number two issue, closely behind, is fuel and energy costs. No surprise. These are key issues that are not being tackled by this government.

Part of the problem with this government is that they're in denial about the facts. You can hear the Minister of Economic Development continually talk about the jobs that have been created. However, of critical importance, cabinet was told in a confidential pre-budget document just last year, "The economy has not yet regained the strength of pre-2008," the recession.

This is from the Ministry of Finance: "[There are] fewer jobs relative to the population and more unemployed. Per capita output of the economy remains below its pre-recession benchmark." So when the minister says to us, "We created X thousands of jobs last month or last year," they may be cherry picking a correct number, but our population has increased so largely that there are fewer jobs relative to our population. That's from the Ministry of Finance.

So part of the problem, we understand, again from the Ministry of Finance confidential advice to cabinet—the new members of the Liberal caucus especially should be going through those controversial files; I'd be happy to turn them over to you anytime.

1350

Here's what the Ministry of Finance said to cabinet. These are quotes: "Changes since the 2012 budget show a deterioration in the fiscal outlook beyond 2013-14." This is really disturbing because they want to go ahead and spend this money, but they have no idea where it's coming from.

This is from the Ministry of Finance: "Over the medium term, we have notional targets by sector that add up to the deficit numbers, but not yet plans to deliver them." So what they're saying here is, "Yup, we know that we have to, but we don't know how."

This is their own ministry: "For the extended look, neither targets nor plans yet exist." So tomorrow, we know where we've got to be better than where we are

today, but we don't know how to get there. For the day after tomorrow, we don't even know where we need to be, let alone how to get there.

This is their own Ministry of Finance, which provided these documents to cabinet to give an awareness, an awakening, a sense of urgency to the Liberal government that all is not well. They didn't seem to remember last May when Moody's downgraded their outlook. That didn't help. It was, "Damn the torpedoes. Full steam ahead!" They didn't seem to react adversely when Fitch downgraded our credit rating. They did not seem to react with any changes whatsoever when Moody's had a negative outlook only a few weeks ago.

This followed very shortly after the Auditor General said, in December 2014, "Folks, you've got to change the way you're headed." Your deficit is growing. Your debt is the highest it has ever been. In fact, it has doubled in the 11 years the Liberals have been in power. You've got to take drastic action and change the direction you're headed. The Auditor General, the Bank of Canada, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, their own Ministry of Finance: All of these organizations are telling the government, "You've got to stop what you're doing, turn the ship around and head in the right direction." Sadly, we haven't seen any change in direction from this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to stand up to give some context and some debate to the interim spending motion that's before us. Actually, some of my comments may complement the PC finance critic because we are all concerned about jobs.

Today in this Legislature, the Canadian Federation of Students is here. They are lobbying for equal access to education. I think that all of us in this House know that we will never address the failing economy, the drag on the economy and the lack of productivity unless we seriously address the inequities in access to post-secondary education and colleges. I think they've made a very compelling case here. They have a report that I'm sure all MPPs will be getting. It's called Turning the Page: A New Chapter for Ontario's Post-Secondary Students.

From my riding, we have the Wilfrid Laurier University Graduate Students' Association, but from my alma mater—I'm a proud Carleton graduate—the Carleton University Students' Association and the Carleton University Graduate Students' Association are here, and they make what I would consider a compelling case.

Before, when the House leader stood up, he said that this motion will allow us, as a Legislature, to address our priorities of health care, of education, of economic development, of jobs and of the economy. Unless we take a serious step back and look at the funding priorities of this government, the Liberal government of Ontario will be spending a good deal of its time trying to bite its own

neck, because you will not be able to address those priorities in this province unless you look at where the money is going.

I'm new to the finance critic portfolio, but I really like it. I want to tell you why—and you have no choice; I'm going to tell you anyway. It's because it's not about ideology. It's about where the money is going, where the investments are going, and what is making a difference in the province.

Clearly, the Canadian Federation of Students is addressing long-term, systemic issues around post-secondary education, which obviously has a direct impact on jobs and the economy. They have called on this government to develop a long-term strategy for the progressive reduction of tuition fees in the province. They've presented a plan: a one-year plan, a three-year plan. The three-year plan has zero in year one but a 16.3% reduction through a reallocation of funds from the Ontario tuition grant, which is not really working despite what we hear, and the provincial education tax credits, and then \$500 million in years two and three, which would result in an 8.3% reduction per year. This would be a total cost of \$134 million, but they make the financial case for increased access, increased jobs, increased productivity, and one of those core priorities that the House leader says this government cares about, which is education.

I'd like to remind people in this House that in an economy where over 75% of newly posted jobs require the completion of college or university, it is not surprising that an increasing number of students and their families view higher education as less of an option and more of a necessity. We share this view completely. But let's also remember that tuition fees climbed from an average of \$1,464 in 1990 to a staggering \$7,235 in 2013, with no sign of stopping soon. So this is a crisis of affordability.

As we discuss this motion in the House today, we have to be really clear that post-secondary education—those doors are slamming shut in the faces of youth in this province of Ontario. At the same time, we have to consider the way that those educational services are delivered. I think my colleague from London West has presented a private member's bill around integrated work opportunities, learning and work opportunities, and addressing the scourge, the growing issue in this province, of unpaid and illegal internships.

This group obviously has put into context the rhetoric of what we have heard about post-secondary education and the reality. I think that's the valuable part of groups coming here and actually lobbying us.

There was a freeze, though. There was a moment of hope, and I want to give the government from 2004 to 2006 credit for that freeze. But then that was abruptly lifted and tuition fees have been on track to double under the Liberal government. Instead of addressing the core issues affecting post-secondary education in Ontario—increasingly cumbersome upfront costs, deteriorating quality and crumbling infrastructure—decision-makers

have thrown students' finances and futures around like a ball to score political points.

We share their concerns in this regard, and we think that affordable and accessible education is one of those key priorities that we could work on together. But, unfortunately, in 2013, the provincial government introduced a new four-year tuition fee framework, and under this tuition fee framework they can increase by 3% for most programs and 5% for graduate and professional programs. So there's definitely a disconnect between talking about valuing post-secondary education and stating that those doors need to stay open for the growing income inequality in this province to be addressed—I think it's important for us to know that, by 2016-17, tuition fees will have increased by up to 108% since the Liberals took office in 2003. It's worse for professional programs, and we know that professional programs are a major obstacle for this province. We need those professional jobs—engineers. China, India—engineers are coming out of those countries, besides being disproportionate to population, like you wouldn't believe. It's incredible. We need the engineers, we need the doctors and we need the professions that are going to help us get climate change on track, help us make for a fairer justice system.

I think the Canadian Federation of Students has made a very compelling case for this government to seriously look at where you're investing and look at the return on investment for education. Education is always worth fighting for, Mr. Speaker, and it's a pleasure to bring that point to this Legislature.

1400

The second issue is health care, which the House leader also raised. The finance committee got to travel around the province—six Liberals, two Conservatives and me. It was a great deal of fun, I must tell you. We were able to address and listen to, first-hand, not the press releases, not the ribbon cuttings, but the lived experiences of people in this province, who we work for, who we are supposed to be accountable to. There was one woman in particular, up in Sudbury, who told a story of her 93-year-old grandmother who was in the hallway for three days. Medical procedures were being done on this poor woman. It's definitely an issue of integrity. The nurses of Ontario have raised the new phenomenon of hallway nursing. This is the new norm. One of the members from the committee said, "Well, wasn't she getting care?" We need to set the benchmark higher than medical procedures being performed in hallways in hospitals in the province of Ontario. That can be addressed by finding that balance between the community health teams and the hospital budgets.

Those hospitals are being inundated because this government has not acted on their promise of funding those LHINs accordingly. All that's happening in our communities is that those local health agencies are competing for the same pots of money. There's that saying: When the water hole gets lower and lower and lower, the animals start looking at each other a little differently. It's a crisis in health care right now.

We're big proponents of early intervention and prevention because it's a smart place to invest money—upstream, not downstream. It's more ethical. It's a principle that this entire province was built on: that when you go to a hospital or a doctor, you have equal access to that health care system. It's the same principle in education, which is why, when the House leader stood up and said that today's motion has to do with the priorities of this government, we should be adhering to those priorities. The government should be acting on the promises that they made, and they should be doing so in a financial way. We've called on ending the freeze on hospital-based operating budgets in order to stop the bed closures and front-line staffing cuts that obviously negatively impact patient care. We have called on this government—and our health critic, France Gélinas, who's dealing with a tragedy in her community and can't be here today, has raised the issue of the need for dental coverage for children. This is something that should totally be a non-partisan issue. The consolidation of those six agencies to deliver health care—and she has talked to those front-line people, and they have said that this will reduce access for children to preventive dental care, which in turn leads to long-standing issues, health care system issues, missing school. Everybody in this House has experienced dental pain. Why would we not be proactive and “progressive”? Why should we not be talking about the importance of early intervention and prevention on dental care? It makes sense. So we've called on this government to cancel its plans to reduce preventive dental coverage for children and to maintain preventive dental care in Ontario, public health standards, and maintain full funding for Children in Need of Treatment, the CINOT program. We fear, as has already been revealed through our health critic, that these changes will reduce access, and all of us in this House should have a concern about that.

The last issue on health care—I know that when the House leader brought up this issue, he identified it as a priority. We've heard a lot about shifting the culture of wellness in this province, which indicates that this government is looking at early intervention and prevention, and yet we have seniors who end up in emergency room facilities because there is such a crisis in underfunding of home care services and long-term care. It costs more. That's the message: It costs more.

On public education, though, what I forgot to mention is that we have enough data now—we have enough reports, going back 15, 17 years to the Rozanski report, which highlighted the \$2 billion in cuts. This government continually points to increases in education, but you've got to follow the money, because that money has gone to new programs, like the full-day kindergarten, for instance. I have nothing against it. I only wish that you had actually followed through on the original report, *With Our Best Future in Mind*, by Charles Pascal. If you had done that, you would see a huge increase in school-based child care, and you could have transferred that money to community-based child care instead of closing 18 centres across the province.

This is about policy and legislation affecting the bottom line. This is about where money is going in the province. Actually, Hugh Mackenzie just came out with a report and highlighted the new spending priorities and that traditional, systemic underfunding in issues like special education, for instance—those systemic gaps in funding still exist, and you can't deny it. You can point to the big number over here, but it's going to new spending priorities; it's not going to where the front-line services are.

If there's a smart place to invest in education, again, it's earlier. If you get to a learning disability earlier in the life of a child, that child will see huge positive returns in that their educational experience will be better; it will be more positive. That has a financial positive at the end of it as well.

Finally, the issue of economic development, employment and infrastructure: I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, on this file, when I look at where the money is going in this province, and where the Auditor General flagged where the funding is going, I think we should have a full stop right now on how infrastructure is being invested, because it is going to places which are not benefitting the people of this province. We all have some understanding of how big that infrastructure gap is, and it's growing.

The Auditor General made some recommendations, and because we are talking about funding, I need to address some of those. The Auditor General says, “Infrastructure Ontario should, in conjunction with the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, gather data on actual cost experience from recent public-sector infrastructure procurements and alternative financing and procurements (AFPs) and revise its” value-for-money “assessment methodology to ensure that the valuation of risks assumed to be retained under both the AFP and public-sector delivery models are well justified.”

What have we heard from this minister? It is the sound of silence. If I was the minister, I would be going right now to Infrastructure Ontario, as was recommended by the Auditor General, to review this practice. I would look at who is doing the value-for-money assessments and who is benefitting from doing the value-for-money assessments. If I was this government, I would be looking for money to meet the priorities that you talk about, like climate change, like education, like health care.

The Auditor General points out that the financing cost for AFPs was \$6.5 billion. We spent \$6.5 billion more on financing for P3 projects than we needed to. This isn't about ideology; it's about where the money is going. How much more infrastructure can we build for \$6.5 billion? How many more hospitals and front-line health care can we ensure people have access to with \$6.5 billion?

This report that the Auditor General shared with this government essentially puts all the other scandals to shame. Ornge was \$1 billion; eHealth was \$1 billion; the gas plants were \$1.1 billion, originally predicted at \$40

million. This is \$8.2 billion. It warrants the attention of this government.

It defies all logic, Mr. Speaker, that the rhetoric we hear back from this government is that P3s are more efficient, which is not true, and that they're less costly, which is not true. They build in a cost overrun right at the beginning. They say that the risk is actually being transferred. But at the end of the day, it's our money, so what risk is being transferred? We're still on the line for the costs. We have to take a good, hard look to dispel the myths around publicly funded infrastructure projects, and then we have to counter with those P3 projects, of course, that have cost overruns.

1410

Just in the newspaper over the weekend, the consortium Ontario Sports Solutions—and this is Hamilton's Pan Am Games stadium. "Subcontractors on the project say they haven't been paid in full." You know what actually happens—I know you don't like to hear it, but the transfer gets passed down to the smaller and smaller and smaller subcontractors, and they don't get paid. At the very top, everyone's got their share. They've got their millions of dollars.

I just want to remind people in this House, when you talk broadly about projects, about AFPs, that this P3 project, Hamilton's Pan Am Games stadium, was supposed to be completed last June. So it's not on time. The senior consortium partner, a French-owned company, Bouygues Building Canada, is in a financial stand-off right now.

"A much larger entity is taking advantage of the sub trades in our opinion," said Scott MacKenzie of Brascon, which says it is owed \$133,000." The dispute, of course, now has been—they end up back at Infrastructure Ontario, the government agency, as we all know, that awarded contracts to Ontario Sports Solutions for building the Hamilton stadium under what is known, obviously, as an AFP.

We hear lots of information about how efficient, how less costly, how innovative these P3 projects can be, when we've seen example after example that that's not a consistent truth in this province of Ontario.

If I were the government and I had this Auditor General's report in front of me, and she identified with great clarity where this province could save money and where that money could then be syphoned or directed to the priorities that this government says that they value, that would be very, I think, beneficial.

The government is probably going to come back with the Spadina extension. That Spadina extension—that's a cursed project, I think. It has been overseen by every single government for years now. It is not the project that you hold up as, obviously, the best project in the province of Ontario. I can tell you that much.

But we know better today. We know better. Finally someone, the Auditor General, the independent officer of this Legislature, highlighted the fact that private project managers also tend to charge higher legal and management fees, which are more costly. As well—and this is

the big part—they must return profits to their owners. So profit is still the driving factor in AFPs. Those who really like public-private partnerships insist that while all of this may be true, privately managed projects are far more likely to come in on time and under budget. Well, if you build a 30% buffer on any project—any contractor in the province of Ontario is going to say, "If you build in a 28% profit margin, I could get that done on time." That's just what they'll say to you. It's ridiculous.

The minister without portfolio, who is not here today, likes to say, "Bob Rae and the 407—he used a public-private partnership." Yet in the end, the Rae government had to borrow the \$1 billion itself and then pass it on to the consortium. The private sector partners just couldn't raise cash as cheaply.

If I leave you with anything, it is this: Why is this government borrowing money for infrastructure at credit card rates when the government can get the best interest rate in the province of Ontario? Why is that money going to those lawyers and those consultants and those financial companies when we know better in 2015? There is a moral imperative, never mind an economic imperative, to ensure that we invest in infrastructure so that it benefits the people of this province, that we invest in infrastructure so it strengthens the economy and that we invest in infrastructure in a fiscally responsible manner. The Auditor General has called into question the way that AFPs are determined, who is doing the value-for-money assessments and the modelling of those value assessments.

If I was the government, I would be taking this report, I would be going down to Infrastructure Ontario and I would be following up and making sure that some better practices, more transparent and more accountable practices, are put into place so the people of this province are better served through infrastructure investment. I would just like to leave you with that, Mr. Speaker.

Health care, education, economic development, infrastructure: This province will not recover in an economic manner without addressing these key issues of where taxpayer money is invested, and we will spend the next three and a half years watching this government bite its own neck.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: It's my pleasure to speak today on this interim supply motion. I'm going to be speaking about the process here a little bit, but I do want to start off with a brief summary of what this motion is.

This motion grants the government unfettered authority to spend money from April 1 of this year to September 30 of this year—for six months. For six months, the government will have the absolute authority to spend money even before the budget has been introduced, let alone passed, without any oversight or any transparency. For half the year, the government will have authority to spend money.

Now, we know in this fiscal year, they're planning on spending \$127 billion. I don't know what they're plan-

ning for this coming fiscal year, but their track record would suggest that they plan on spending more in the next fiscal year than they did this year. This House will not have any way to measure or examine that.

This is where I want to go back to the process. A lot of people in this province ask me, and they wonder, why is it that Ontario always finds itself mired in wasteful financial scandals? I don't have to repeat the names; we all know the names of these financial scandals. But I do want the members in this House and the people listening today to understand why it is that Ontario always finds itself mired in scandal. It is a simple reason: Our process and our standing orders actually prevent this Legislature from evaluating and examining the financial transactions of the government.

I'll start off with a couple of things. In estimates committee—a lot of people may not understand this—this year, we got to examine six ministries, the expenditures of six ministries, and that's all we were allowed to look at. Every other ministry was deemed to be passed. There's 27 ministries; we got to look at six of them.

A number of the expenditures of the House, all those offices that show up in the estimates volume 2, are prevented from being examined by this Legislative Assembly. Even the Office of the Legislative Assembly, which appears in volume 2 of the estimates: This House is not allowed to look at its expenditures. We are the only province and the only Parliament in the country that has this process that limits the number of ministries that we're allowed examine, but also then deems all others to be passed. We're the only such Parliament in this country.

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Even the House of Commons is limited to seeking interim supply for a three-month period. This motion, which is in agreement with the standing orders, gives half a year of expenditures. Does anybody want to know why? Our standing orders.

Let me give you a couple of other examples for members in this House.

In Newfoundland, estimates not examined by the estimates committee are moved to the Committee of the Whole on supply.

In Nova Scotia, they're limited to five ministries to be examined by estimates, but then all other ministries are referred to Committee of the Whole.

Alberta has no limits on the amount of ministries or agencies that come before public accounts. This year, Alberta brought 15 agencies and ministries before their estimates committee; we were allowed to examine six.

BC also has no limit on the amount of ministries or agencies under review.

Saskatchewan is probably one of the best Legislatures in this country for allowing examination of financial transactions, and I say that to give you a bit of a rundown on just how the standing orders of this House prevent and restrict financial oversight.

As I mentioned, expenditures that show up in volume 2 of the estimates cannot be looked at.

I would say, as I'm talking to everybody in this House today: How many people here have actually gone through and looked at the public accounts of the province?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I have.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I see that one hand has been raised of somebody who has gone through the public accounts.

Now, I should put this out: Have you gone through all three volumes or just one of the three volumes? There's a lot of information in here that records and documents the financial transactions of the government. However, they're all documented in here—or quite a bit of them are—but then this House refuses to allow us to look at them.

In Quebec, the time allowed for considering the main estimates is 200 hours—200 hours. This year, we had approximately 45 hours to examine the main estimates and that was over the six ministries. In Quebec, you can examine any ministry for up to 20 hours. These are all important rules.

And I'll just take us back a little bit. The primary function, the primary duty and responsibility of this House is to take its responsibility, examine and then provide concurrence that the government expenditures are appropriate. Well, we've really tied not one hand behind our back; we've tied both hands behind our back because we're saying, "You're allowed to look at a couple of ministries, but if you haven't gotten them done by the middle of November of each year, all those expenditures will be deemed to be passed."

That brings us back to this interim supply. Not only have we done an absolutely pathetic and poor job of examining—been prevented from examining the financial transactions of the government in this current fiscal year under the standing orders; we also go out and grant the government complete, arbitrary authority to spend money for six months, even before a budget has been introduced.

I understand the time frames. I think the federal House of Commons has got it right. There is a window, but a very small window, when government can spend money without the agreement of Parliament—a very small window, not half the year.

We need to start taking a look at what our rules are here and how our rules actually work in opposition to our responsibilities. We do have that responsibility to ensure to our constituents that we have examined government expenditures. It's not just the role of the opposition. It is the role of every backbencher in the Liberal Party to examine the expenditures of government. It is the role of every minister to examine the expenditures of their ministries. It is a job for all of us that we ought to take seriously. But we can't take it seriously if there are going to be only one or two of us in this House who actually look at the public accounts; if there are only one or two of us who actually read the estimates; if there are, indeed, whole ministries and offices of Parliament where we are prevented from examining their expenditures.

Speaker, my call-out to the Liberal government is that they will get this interim supply, but it's time that we all stand up and do our job, represent our constituents well and start examining the financial transactions and ending the financial mismanagement that this Liberal government consistently always gets this province into.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Yvan Baker: I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak in support of the motion for interim supply for the 2015-16 fiscal year. In this Legislature, every day, we debate a range of issues that are important to our constituents because we believe they will improve the quality of life for people in our constituencies and across our province. Today, I speak to a motion that is important to ensuring that we continue to make those investments to preserve the services that Ontarians rely on every day, to support the quality of life that we all enjoy.

As mentioned by the government House leader earlier today, this motion is fairly routine but it is important. It is an important part of the fiscal cycle. It provides the government with temporary spending authority in order for the government to continue to fund important programs and services during the beginning of the new fiscal year which starts on April 1, 2015.

Specifically, this would ensure that we can continue to implement the government's plan to support a stronger Ontario. The plan, of course, is built around a number of pillars: investing in people, building modern infrastructure, supporting a strong and innovative business climate—but all of this on a foundation of fiscal responsibility. As the PA to Minister Matthews at Treasury Board, I can vouch for the fact that that's exactly what we're doing, that we're trying to invest while on a foundation of fiscal responsibility.

We are committed to responsible fiscal management, making sure that every dollar counts as we work towards balancing the budget. That's one of the things that I heard from my constituents when I was out in the community during the election campaign. I've heard it a lot since, and I hear it in my constituency office. They're asking me and they're asking all of us here to make sure that we're getting maximum value for the dollars that we invest on behalf of the people of Ontario, whether that be in education or in health care or anywhere else. I know Minister Matthews and all the ministers who are here today, and those who aren't present at this moment, are working towards that objective.

We know that the road ahead won't always be easy. There will be challenges along the way. But I think we have a plan that we can be proud of, a plan that invests in the people of this province and the programs and services that they rely on.

What I want to do in the few minutes that I have is just talk about some of the highlights of the plan for fiscal 2015-16 and beyond. The government has made substantial progress on its plan to build Ontario up and to create a fairer and more prosperous province. We're committed

to building opportunity, creating jobs and ensuring long-term security for people across the province, again by investing in people's talents, by investing not only in the present but also in the future. We talk about investments for the future. We're talking about things like infrastructure—like roads, like transit—and also creating a dynamic and supportive environment for business. That's critical, because that's what allows us to create jobs in this province—to preserve jobs, to create jobs—and to provide for and support the prosperity that Ontarians deserve.

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Ontario's economic performance has demonstrated that many of these policies are bearing fruit. For example, Ontario saw an increase of about 1,300 jobs in the month of January alone. Since the low point of the recession, in June 2009, we've added 508,700 jobs, and almost 348,000 of these jobs were in the private sector; so, a lot of jobs, a lot of growth since the recession. I think this is a reflection of the hard work of Ontario and the hard work of this government, which is implementing policies to support that recovery and economic growth. Unemployment is down to 6.9% from a high of 9.5% in June 2009.

This is good progress, but there's more work to be done. In that vein, I just want provide a few highlights of the work that is being done.

In 2014, the Premier led a trade mission to China, and secured almost \$1 billion in new investment. This will create more than 1,800 jobs in communities across our province. The Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs will be leading a mission to China next month to help small and medium-sized Ontario businesses engage successfully with the Chinese market.

I talked earlier about the importance of not only investing in the present but investing in the future. To help with increasing population growth and demands on infrastructure and services, we're also investing \$130 billion in public infrastructure over the next 10 years, including \$29 billion for transportation. This is important, because it will ease congestion across the GTA and Hamilton area and support the building and maintenance of roads, bridges and other critical infrastructure.

This supply motion supports the continued funding of this plan that provides these critical supports to our economy and to our infrastructure and services across Ontario. Just these investments alone that I talked about, particularly the ones in infrastructure, will create more than 110,000 jobs this year.

When I think about the priorities of the people of my riding—the people of Etobicoke Centre—and all across Ontario, I also think about our health care and education. Our government has committed to invest in hospitals but also to expand funding to home care, something that is so important in so many of our ridings but particularly in my riding, where we have one of the highest proportions of seniors of any riding in the country.

We've also committed to continuing to strengthen the quality of our education system here in Ontario. Our Minister of Education is here with us today, and I know she's doing excellent work on that front.

We're going to do all these things while continuing to work to eliminate the deficit, knocking it down to a forecasted \$8.9 billion on our way toward a balanced budget in 2017-18. But we're going to do that responsibly.

The Premier's Advisory Council on Government Assets was asked to find ways to increase efficiencies and unlock the value of government assets, and we look forward to receiving the council's findings, which will inform our decisions to increase revenue and reinvest in priority infrastructure projects.

The supply motion we're talking about today allows us to continue forward with this plan. That supply motion and that plan will not sacrifice important public services with across-the-board cuts. At the same time, we do recognize the importance of spending restraint. Due to the government's efforts, program spending is projected to grow at an average rate of 0.8% through to 2017-18.

Ontario continues to have the lowest per capita program spending among provinces, and the lowest total government revenue per person among the provinces, including funding for federal transfers. I think this is a sign of the work this government is doing.

In addition, we'll continue to make every dollar count, ensuring that Ontarians get value for money. The program review, renewal and transformation initiative that Minister Matthews is leading will look at how every dollar across government is spent. We're going to use evidence to inform our decisions and improve outcomes for people. We're working across government to find the best way to deliver programs and services, again, always seeking the best value for the people of Ontario.

The program review is building on previous action taken by our government, including the implementation of recommendations from the Drummond commission. We're also going to take a strong but fair approach to managing public sector compensation and benefit costs.

Speaker, on a personal note, I am honoured to be working with Minister Matthews and Treasury Board to protect important services by working toward a balanced budget and ensuring that we maximize value for taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. Speaker, I started by speaking to the fact that we're here to improve the quality of life of Ontarians. I think that we are. To do so, we need to continue to support the government's plan that I just spoke of and support the key services that Ontarians rely on every single day. That is why this interim supply motion is so important. The supply motion would give our government the necessary spending authority to finance important public services that Ontarians rely on.

I encourage all members to support this motion so that we can continue to provide the best and most dependable public service possible and to continue to improve the quality of life of all Ontarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to have an opportunity to speak on the supply motion, which really, as I'm sure you'll agree, lets me speak about whatever I might like to speak about—one of the beauties of speaking to it.

I thought I'd start out by just talking a bit about something that's a big concern to me, and that's the general finances of the province of Ontario. We keep hearing about how the government is, in their own words, over-achieving. They make budgets and then they do better than their budgets. They talk about how prudent they are and how wonderful everything is. But if you actually look at the numbers after things have passed, we seem to be going in the wrong direction. This year the budget deficit is forecast to be \$12.5 billion. This year it's more than all the other provinces put together, and it has gone up in the past three years, so we're trending in the wrong direction.

I recommend to everyone the Auditor General's annual report, which comes out in December each year. It's a pretty thick document. There's certainly good information in it. The Auditor General, Bonnie Lysyk, takes the unusual step of talking a fair amount about the growing debt of the province of Ontario and the concerns with the affordability of that debt. I think that is certainly noteworthy. In round numbers, she said that the debt is on its way to being some \$340 billion, I believe, by the time the government predicts it may balance its budget, in 2017-18. But really, it's how you measure whether you can afford that debt that I think is key. The measure that's usually used is net debt as a percentage of the gross domestic product of the whole economy of the province of Ontario. Back when the current government was elected in 2003, that was about 27% of the gross domestic product; the debt was 27% of the gross domestic product.

In the auditor's report, she goes on, and I'll maybe just read this so I get it exactly correct. She says, "Our key commentary in chapter 2 is on Ontario's growing debt burden. Although the focus on eliminating Ontario's annual deficit is important, we think that government should provide more information on how it plans to achieve its longer-term objective of reducing its net debt-to-GDP ratio to its pre-recession level of 27%. Ontario's net debt-to-GDP ratio is projected to reach a high of 40.5% in 2015-16, after which the government expects it to decline. The net debt-to-GDP ratio is a key indicator of the government's financial ability to carry its debt relative to the size of the economy."

She goes on: "In fact, net debt (the difference between the government's liabilities and its total assets) and total debt (the total amount of borrowed money the government owes to external parties) are both expected to continue growing in absolute terms even after the province starts to run annual budget surpluses"—and that's a big "if"; I'm putting in some commentary there. "This important fact should not go unnoticed by the members of the Legislature and the public. We estimate that total

debt will exceed \$340 billion by 2017-18 (it was at \$295.8 billion on March 31, 2014).

"By 2017-18, the year the government projects it will achieve an annual surplus, Ontario's net debt will have more than doubled over a 10-year period, from \$156.6 billion in 2007-08 to over \$325 billion by 2017-18. To put this in perspective, to eliminate Ontario's 2017-18 estimated net debt, every man, woman and child in Ontario would need to contribute \$23,000 to the provincial coffers. We recommended that the government provide information on how it plans to achieve its target of reducing its net debt-to-GDP ratio to a prerecession level of 27%."

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In the auditor's own words, that's something that is of real concern to me. Again, I think we need to highlight that as often as we can.

I also want to briefly talk about other issues that have been raised. I note the member from Nipissing went through the Canadian Federation of Independent Business' survey, which is always a useful tool. They're surveying people who are in business to see what their big concerns are. The number one concern was red tape. I believe he said that 94% of those voting said that was their number one issue: the time, if you're in business, you spend trying to comply with the various regulations that we come up with in this place.

But the number two concern was energy costs: 93% of the people were concerned with energy costs. That's certainly something that the Auditor General speaks to in her annual report as well. Particularly, there's a whole section on smart meters and the implementation of smart meters that I would recommend people to read, where it points out that it was supposed to cost \$1 billion. It actually cost \$1.9 billion, and it's not actually achieving its goal of shifting electricity demand. The big reason is because of the huge subsidies being paid for the feed-in-tariff contracts, mainly for wind and solar power, and just the huge numbers those are expected to be.

In her own words, talking about the global adjustment, she states that it "now accounts for 70%" of electricity rates and people don't see that on their average bill. They just see their electricity rates going up. They don't actually know that 70% of it is the global adjustment. The global adjustment was 0.4 cents per kilowatt hour. The global adjustment is now 5.5 cents per kilowatt hour. It's gone up some 1,200%. When you look at the absolute numbers, they are huge numbers. It was \$8.5 billion that people were paying on their hydro bills in 2014 for the global adjustment, \$9.4 billion in 2015, and predicted to be, for 2006-15, \$50 billion—huge numbers that people are paying on their hydro bills. That's just a very big concern when you see from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business that energy cost is one of their biggest concerns.

You look at the fact that in Ontario we've lost companies like Xstrata in Timmins, where there was a smelter, and the 700 jobs moved across the border to Quebec. You have to ask yourself, with the Ring of Fire,

whether there's ever going to be a smelter in Ontario with these high energy costs. I have in my own riding Kimberly-Clark in Huntsville, a tissue mill, and their number one issue is cost of energy and reliability of energy. It's a very big issue that affects creating jobs here in the province of Ontario.

I just have a minute left and I wanted to briefly mention, as a critic for mining, that the Fraser Institute's report on mining came out recently and, unfortunately, it's not good news for the province of Ontario. They have a measure that is called the investment attractiveness index that gets feedback from all over the world on the mineral potential, the geology and also the policy perception, to look at the policies of the government and how they're affecting investment in mining. Ontario, last year, was 14th, which wasn't that great, but the bad news is, from last year to this year we've gone from 14th up nine spots to 23rd. We're absolutely going in the wrong direction, and we see very little activity happening on the Ring of Fire. The bad news there, of course, is that Cliffs Natural Resources has pretty much got their operations for sale and essentially—

Interjection.

Mr. Norm Miller: Yes, they've left the country. I think we need some better mining policy.

I see my time is up, Mr. Speaker, so I will end it there. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Wayne Gates: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for allowing me to speak here today. There are two issues I'd like to highlight to the House and my fellow members.

The first one is around GO train services to Niagara Falls. I've raised this issue in the House a number of times. I'm going to speak to it again. The Niagara region is united—the keyword there is "united"—in its ask to the province to provide daily two-way GO service all the way to Niagara Falls.

Make no mistake about it: GO is a game-changer for Niagara. We have thousands and thousands of people commuting from Niagara to Toronto every single day—50,000 every day. Our highways are clogged, and the commutes are terrible. I drive the same route from Queen's Park back to Niagara Falls. What used to take an hour now takes three. We have workers in Niagara who need to leave three hours early just to be able to get to work.

I look across the floor here—I see everybody listening intently on this issue—and it was one of your Liberal members from St. Catharines who was here with me last Friday. We left at 3:10 and 3:15, almost the same time. It took us over three hours to get to St. Catharines. That's your member. So nobody can say that this isn't happening when people are trying to get to Toronto to work.

Think about this: We have one of the highest unemployment rates, and it makes no sense. When you're trying to make sure that you're going to get rid of the deficit, what better way to do it than to put people back to

work? We can do that in Niagara through tourism. The wine industry is growing by leaps and bounds. Craft brewers are growing.

Take a look at what has happened to our dollar over the last little while. Our dollar was at \$1.10; it's now down to 80 cents, 78 cents. What is that doing to the auto industry? In Niagara, we have General Motors, where they still have 2,500 people working right in the plant, and that's not counting the other spinoff jobs that are in the community. So now you're talking 10,000 or 12,000 jobs. That's what can happen if we can bring GO to Niagara.

Daily two-way GO service is the economic boost our region needs, but, quite frankly, it's the economic boost that Ontario needs. It's something that can make Niagara the economic driver of all Ontario. It will connect Niagara with the GTA. People can travel to Toronto to work, tourists can come and see Niagara, and we'll take them off our highways. Wouldn't that be nice? Think about it.

I've listened to the other side over the last few weeks with Bill 31. They talk about improving the environment. What better way to improve the environment than getting people out of their cars and into GO trains?

The Premier—not Wayne Gates—said during the election that the GO train to Niagara was a “very high priority.” The chair of her caucus, again, from St. Catharines, said he could see it coming to Niagara in 2015. Well, it's 2015.

I'd like to let the Premier and all the members of this House know that there's going to be a rally in Niagara Falls this Friday. It begins at 11:30 a.m., and you're all welcome to come, all three parties. It's going to kick off our public campaign to bring GO to Niagara. Here's what's important on this: All the mayors—it doesn't matter if they're in St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Thorold, Welland, Grimsby, Wainfleet, Port Colborne—will be there. Their elected regional councillors will be there. The city councillors of all those communities are going to be there. And they'll all be there to show support for what? For GO. Because they know it's a game-changer for us. We're hoping that the Premier will see this rally and follow through on what her party said they would do during the last election.

This is not something that can wait 10 years. Quite frankly, the economy of Ontario can't wait 10 years. It needs to happen now, just like they said: 2015.

Bringing the GO train to Niagara can create good-paying jobs right here in Ontario. It can create economic activity. It can allow smart—I'm going to say that again: It can allow smart and talented young people to work in Toronto and live in their home communities. It can allow people from Toronto to visit our excellent wineries that we have in Niagara-on-the-Lake and the amazing sites that we have in Niagara Falls—unfortunately, the agriculture minister probably just left—and the race track in Fort Erie, where we need more racing dates—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to remind the member for Niagara Falls not to make reference to the absence of any other member. We're all

occasionally not in the chamber, so that's why we ask everyone to observe that rule.

The member for Niagara Falls has the floor.

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Mr. Wayne Gates: I apologize.

GO is a game-changer. Our rally on Friday will show that the public wants it and that they are united behind it. I hope this government will honour their commitment for daily two-way service to Niagara Falls. It will support the 450,000 residents and the province of Ontario.

I have one other thing I'd like to talk about—we've already talked about it a little bit—and that's education. I'd also like to touch on Parliament Oak Public School in Niagara-on-the-Lake. As many of you know, the community group there, Citizens for Accountable and Responsible Education, also known as CARE, is trying to preserve their access to education and now have to go to court to try to save their school. Parliament Oak is the heart of the old town. The community there wants the school to stay open. It will attract young families to settle in Niagara-on-the-Lake and make sure the town keeps growing. Yet the CARE group continues to have to fight to make sure their kids can go to school somewhere close to home.

At first, there were some who were hoping this issue would die in a courtroom. They were hoping that by the time the parents and the community of Niagara-on-the-Lake got their turn to speak in court, the school would already be closed.

This, however, didn't happen. The CARE group won an expedited trial and have a tentative date set for March. While all this is going on, the board continues to be indifferent to the concerns of the parents.

This isn't just parents from Niagara-on-the-Lake anymore; it's parents from small communities across the province of Ontario, communities that don't want to see their schools closed and their education taken away from them. On top of that, we're now hearing that the Minister of Education has not given enough funding to the Crossroads Public School to build the original four classrooms requested by DSBN. Now, they have even less space to deal with even more kids if the school closure happens.

Mr. Speaker, the parents and the children in Niagara-on-the-Lake have been clear: They want to keep Parliament Oak school open. I call on this government to support them and to support education in all the small communities right across the province. We need a fund to keep schools open, not a fund to close them. Schools are the heart of the communities, the heart of the families who go to these schools. Let's keep rural schools open in the province of Ontario.

I'm not sure how much time I have left, but I'm going to talk about one more issue: the hospital in Niagara Falls. In Niagara Falls we're going to have a new hospital. When I was running in a by-election almost a year ago to the day now, I guess a year and a month—I think I've been here a year and a month; time goes quickly when you're having fun.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It feels a lot longer, eh?

Mr. Wayne Gates: No, no. It's been quick.

We're going to build a new hospital, but here's the problem we have, and the Auditor General talked about it: They want to build it as a P3, even though we know now that P3s are more costly, to a tune of \$8.2 billion. So I'm saying to this government: Let's build a hospital in Niagara Falls, let's get it done, but let's build it as a publicly funded, publicly delivered hospital, where you can borrow money at the cheaper rate.

And think about what they did in Peterborough. They built a hospital similar to St. Catharines. St. Catharines was a billion dollars, give or take a couple of dollars. The same hospital, very close to the same size—a few beds less—was built in Peterborough for about \$340 million. So, if you use the same type of thing, imagine what we could do if we build it as a publicly delivered hospital and take the \$600 million or \$700 million you're going to save and reinvest that back into front-line health care for our seniors and for long-term care. Now, wouldn't that make sense to people? That's how the hospitals should be done.

The last thing I'm going to say—because I talked about this very early when I got up here and talked—we have one of the highest unemployment rates in the province of Ontario. There's no need for it, absolutely none. We're going to have an opportunity to build that hospital. Why don't we, when we build a hospital, build it with local workers, local architects, local engineers, local skilled tradespeople, and put those people back to work using our own tax dollars—our own tax dollars putting people to work. Guess what happens when you put them back to work? They pay taxes. How does that help the deficit? They start paying taxes to reduce the deficit. It works. It's how the cycle should work.

So two things on the hospital: Let's build it publicly funded, publicly delivered, and let's utilize the \$600 million or \$700 million dollars we may save by putting it back into front-line care. And let's put Ontarians, let's put people living in the Niagara region back to work and get our unemployment rate down. Thank you very much for the few minutes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I really appreciate the opportunity to debate this interim supply motion. I do wish to remind the members of this Parliament that Ontario's Auditor General, Bonnie Lysyk, has put out a challenge to all of us—to legislators, to this government and to people in Ontario. She presented this during her annual report at the end of last year, and she has asked all of us to start thinking about the debt.

There has been so much conversation about the deficit, the ongoing, to-and-fro debate about the deficit. The government's projections for the deficit are never accurate. They always are out by several billion dollars. Our Auditor General has indicated to us that it is essentially time to cut to the chase, take a look at that debt and give

serious consideration to how we can start paying down that debt, a debt that, year by year, continues to grow.

Why has she put this out? She gave as her primary reason the fact that interest rates, believe it or not in the present climate, will eventually rise, meaning that the interest cost to service Ontario's debt will rise dramatically. Again, this is the main message from Ontario's Auditor General with respect to the finances of the province of Ontario.

There's an example that I use with respect to those of us who have credit cards. I'm sure most of us try to pay them off month by month. You keep in mind, when you do get behind—and so many people do, regrettably—interest compounds quickly. When you miss a payment, or when you only make a minimum payment, unpaid interest, obviously, is added to your debt. For many, this has become an almost impossible cycle to break. The same can be said for governmental jurisdictions right around the world, really, and certainly including the province of Ontario.

For the past few years, much of this present government's spending has been with borrowed money. They're spending it when we do not have the money, in spite of the fact that in my view, and I hope to talk about this a little later, we don't have a revenue problem.

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So the latest figures: Ontario is scheduled to go another \$12.5 billion in the hole this year—that's more than the deficits of all the other provinces combined—and is scheduled to boost the total debt to over \$340 billion by the time the books are promised to be balanced by 2017-18.

There are others who paint an even more dismal picture. This government's hand-picked economist, Don Drummond, brought out his report in 2012 and projected that the deficit in 2017-18 will not be zero, as Kathleen Wynne has promised. He has indicated that in 2017-18, it won't be zero; we're going to be \$30.2 billion in the red, with the way we're going now. Drummond also projected the 2017-18 debt coming in at a whopping \$411.4 billion, not the \$340 billion that has been banded about this winter.

We all know that Dalton McGuinty doubled the debt during his tenure and has that moniker—down my way, he's known as Dalton the Debt Doublor. He earned that mantle honestly. Kathleen Wynne herself will see a doubling of the debt by 2017-18 from that recession level of \$156.6 billion.

Speaker, as we debate Minister Matthews's motion, I ask everyone here to consider the Auditor General's past three annual reports. She commented on the growing debt; she highlighted a number of points. Debt servicing costs reduce funding for other programs, obviously, with potentially reduced funding to pay civil servant salaries—the interim motion we're debating this afternoon. Her second point, as I've mentioned, is greater vulnerability to interest rate increases. Third—I know that our finance critic made mention of that this afternoon—are potential and ongoing credit rating downgrades. These

increase borrowing costs, the most recent example being the concern from the investor credit rating organization Moody's.

Speaker, as debt grows, so does the amount of cash needed to pay the interest on the debt. Ontario now spends more on debt interest than it does on post-secondary education, and these interest costs continue to grow. In fact, the interest on the debt is projected to be the fastest-rising cost for this government over the next four years. To my way of thinking, down the road, this means even less money available for civil servant salaries and programs. By 2017-18, when the total debt is expected to be more than \$340 billion, the government expects to have to spend nearly \$1 in every \$9 of revenue to service that debt. In 2007-08, only \$1 of every \$12 of revenue collected was required to pay the interest.

After the provincial budget was tabled again, in July of last summer, the credit rating agencies reaffirmed their existing ratings for Ontario. However, they have indicated that a downgrade will be almost inevitable eventually, unless the province implements measures to address its higher debt level.

Let's go back to Moody's. In July 2014, Moody's changed its outlook for Ontario from stable to negative and warned of a possible downgrade. Also in July 2014, S&P—Standard and Poor's—reaffirmed its AA-minus rating, with a negative outlook.

DBRS confirmed its rating of AA-low but, similar to Moody's assessment, DBRS noted that the province's medium-term outlook has weakened.

And—this was mentioned earlier—just before Christmas, Fitch also downgraded the province's credit rating to AA-minus.

All the credit rating agencies are keeping an eye on the province of Ontario. They're watching our deliberations, the debate we're having this afternoon, about the need to meet payroll in the coming several months.

Ontario's Auditor General not only put out a challenge; she put out some benchmarks for us to follow, and has recommended a long-term debt reduction plan linked to the target of reducing the net debt-to-GDP ratio to the pre-recession level of 27%. I don't think it's going to happen, from what I see in this House.

I will say that many of those in the know—the Bank of Canada, the Conference Board of Canada, the credit rating agencies that I've mentioned—have very little confidence that this government has the ability to rein in spending.

Moody's, again, brought out a report very recently and noted that Ontario's debt burden has gone up every year since 2009. They compare to it Quebec, where debt has remained stable: "Given such high levels of planned spending, it is our expectation that there will be non-significant reductions in Ontario's debt burden for the next five to 10 years...."

"Moody's rating for Ontario is Aa2 negative and Quebec's Aa2 stable." As I mentioned, "The rating firm downgraded Ontario to negative from stable in July last year, just before the budget" was brought in.

Just to wrap up, I think it's very important for us to dwell on this negative outlook for the province of Ontario. Very simply, in my reading—I've been involved in the study and in readings of the dismal science for something like 40 years now—everybody is telling this government the same thing: Stop the spending. What are we seeing? We're seeing increases in spending.

Here we are today debating a motion to pay the salaries of civil servants. We're talking about paying civil servants' salaries with money we don't have, money we have to borrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Boy, what silly games the Liberals play, I must say. Anyway, it's Inside Baseball, so I won't even comment on it.

Let me just say a couple of things on interim supply in the four minutes and 23 seconds I've got left. I was very interested to read the story—was it on Friday?—about what was going to happen to Highway 69. Was it Friday?

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: If we dial back about five or six weeks ago, there was a by-election in Sudbury. This is related to interim supply, because the money would have to be paid by this assembly. Anyway, back then, there was a by-election, and the government and the then-candidate for office, Mr. Thibeault, got up and made a solemn promise to the people of Sudbury: "If we're elected, if you get this guy of ours elected, if you get our choice candidate, who is the anointed one, elected as the person to represent us in Sudbury, we will deliver Highway 69 by 2017—2018 at the latest," I was told.

There are people who said, "Jeez, we've been promised this before by Rick Bartolucci how many times? But maybe this time—maybe this time—the Liberals really mean it. Maybe the Liberals are not going to break their word on Highway 69 like they did for three elections, and a whole bunch of other issues like PET scans and others." So they thought, "Well, you know what? Let's just give them the confidence, because after all, one of these days, the Liberals have to not"—I can't use the words "lie" or "deceive," because they would be unparliamentary.

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Sorry—that was kind of weird. I would just say the point was that the people of Sudbury thought, for once, "We have hope. We have to have hope that one day the Liberals are actually going to do what they promise they're going to do," unlike the last three or four times when they promised these things and never did them. So, people went to polls, and I'm sure that weighed on them when they came to the decision: "If we have Glenn as a member of the government team, he's going to be able to deliver. He's going to be part of the government team, and everything is going to be wonderful."

It took five weeks and they broke their promise. I can't believe it. They ran up to Sudbury and made an announcement on Friday saying, "Not 2016-17, not 2018, not 2019, but 2020."

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Sorry, I'm off by a year: 2021. Let's do the math here. Not in this term of office, for sure, and not likely the term of office after. What kind of promise is that? You would think the government would at least be holding to the promise they made to Sudburians on Highway 69 for, now, the fourth time. I find it, quite frankly, just reprehensible that the government would do this over and over again.

I guess it goes to show that Liberals will say one thing in an election—they will tell you what you want to hear. They will try to sound one way, but when it comes to actually delivering, they do the complete opposite.

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On that point, I've just got to say to the people who travel Highway 69, if you're not going to get your four-lane highway on time, remember who promised it and remember who didn't deliver it for the fourth time.

At this time, I'd like to acknowledge my good friend Mr. Glenn Thibeault from Sudbury, who used to be a federal member of Parliament, who got to break the promise for the Liberals. He left the New Democrats and became a Liberal so he can break a promise. I've got to say, that is just an amazing thing that he was able to do.

What I also want to just speak to very quickly is the agricultural bill that we have before us, and we spoke about this the other day. There is nothing in this interim supply bill—and there will be nothing in the interim supply motion—that deals with making sure we have money for the risk management plan that the government is going to expand. All members of this House have agreed that the risk management plan, as proposed by the government, is something we can support, but there is not one piece of money that has been attributed by way of the estimates, the interim supply and, I will argue, the final supply bill that puts in place the money we need to make sure that we have a real risk management program that allows us to be able to do what needs to be done to protect farmers.

Again, it's the same thing as the Highway 69 announcement: this time, a promise in the Legislature to do something, but all we really got is a title and no money attached to it. So it's more Liberalism.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you. Further debate?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The other parties have no time left. Further debate?

Mr. Naqvi has moved government notice of motion number 16. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell—unless I receive a vote referral document, and I have from the chief government whip. This asks that the vote be

deferred until tomorrow during the time of deferred votes.

Vote deferred.

ONTARIO IMMIGRATION ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'IMMIGRATION EN ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 2, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 49, An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 49, Loi portant sur l'immigration en Ontario et apportant une modification connexe à la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): When we last debated this motion at second reading, the member for Scarborough—Agincourt I believe had the floor, so we now go to questions and comments with respect to her speech.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I just want to say bravo, about time that the province step up and do what we should have done a long time ago, which is having a greater say about immigration policy in this province.

I know that my colleague Michael Prue, the member for Beaches—East York, advocated that for many, many years because it's really hard to understand why the largest province, Ontario—the most populous province, the province that has most of the immigration coming to it—would not, a long time ago, have decided to take on some of the responsibility for immigration.

We will know in this Legislature that the province of Quebec has been doing so for a long time, and I would argue to great effect. The Quebec government has been able to have an effect on immigration that has been beneficial to them when it comes to making sure that they're able to deal with the economics of who comes over as far as the economics, the jobs, culture etc., which is able to reinforce the province of Quebec.

For example, if I look at the area I come from, there was a conference up in Thunder Bay, I think it was on this weekend, where francophones got together and talked about immigration in northern Ontario. In northern Ontario, especially in the northeast, there is a very large contingent of francophones. We find ourselves to be in the majority in most communities that we live in in the northeast. One of the things that we would hope is that there would be policies in place that at least let francophones who are moving into the country from whatever French country it might be around the world know that northern Ontario would be put on the map when it comes to an option, because if you're French speakers and don't speak English as a second language, you can pretty well live in French in many of the communities that I represent, where there are third-generation and fourth-generation francophones who have a hard time being able to speak English.

It would make some sense for us to have some say when it comes to being able to deal with the issues around immigration as they apply to the province of Ontario. I certainly look forward to this bill to go to committee so we can deal with some of those real issues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I'm happy to have a couple of minutes on Bill 49. One of the goals of this legislation, if passed, would include a vision and objectives for immigration to Ontario, recognizing the long history of immigration etc., and it goes on to speak about a broad vision that it has.

As has been mentioned, one of the goals of this legislation will be to enhance the ability that Ontario has to control its immigration policies, as has long been the case in the province of Quebec. It makes me think, as has been mentioned, about how this has occurred over the last 50, 80 or 100 years. I think about my community of Thunder Bay—Atikokan as well.

It makes me smile, I must say, when we think of and talk about multiculturalism. I think it's fair to say that people in southern Ontario have a bit of an idea that it took root in the bigger centres across Canada. But if you think back on the recent history around the city of Toronto, for example, I think Toronto in the early 1970s was deemed to be one of the most WASPish, if I could use that word, communities that you could probably find, certainly in Ontario and perhaps in the entire country. It has only been in relatively recent history—the last 30 or 40 years—where we've seen a significant multicultural component come to the city of Toronto.

Contrast that to what happened in my community of Thunder Bay: When people talked about multiculturalism, I used to say all the time, "Here in Thunder Bay—Port Arthur and Fort William before we amalgamated in 1970—we were multicultural before people were even talking about multiculturalism." We were multicultural in Port Arthur and Fort William and then in Thunder Bay before it became an official federal policy. We've been doing it for a very long time. We know what it means. It enhances your community. It's a good thing on a variety of levels. My ethnicity being Italian, I can talk at length on the contributions that the Italian community has made in my home community of Thunder Bay.

This legislation is a great piece. It goes a long way to enhancing Ontario's ability to control its own policy, and I hope others will support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to speak to this, and I'll be having a few more minutes later in the day. I think what I want to put on the record is one thing. It's interesting and I'm glad to see—it's a small step forward, but again, I have to bring to light that it has been 12 years of this government in power. I'm wondering why it's so late to the table doing this. We've had issues for these last dozen years that they could have been working on. It

seems almost like with the feds introducing their expression-of-interest policy—or the intent to do that in 2015—that this has actually finally propelled them. I'd say it's a good step in the right direction, but I certainly would like to see it.

I'm also concerned that there are a lot of other environmental challenges that we're experiencing right now that are forcing some of these immigrants to either not stay in Ontario or to go to other provinces. Our high price of power is certainly one of those detriments, the red tape and administration costs, and I think just with the fear of the debt and the deficit, of where our province is, a lot of companies are choosing to go elsewhere and a lot of the new Canadians who are coming here are picking provinces other than Ontario.

I was pleased to see that there is a piece of the bill that references the Regulated Health Professions Act amendment. This bill will amend the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, to allow for the creation of regulations that speed up the process of registering as a member of the college. One of the things we all continually hear is—certainly when I'm down in the city; I travel a lot and I talk to a lot of people down here—people are still very frustrated with the qualifications that they come to our country with. They've gone through all the proper training and yet they're years and years and years getting the equivalent here and sometimes are never able to get that. They have to leave their chosen occupation, have to not utilize the services and the skills and the expertise that they have had in their own country, bring them here—that we could be utilizing and leveraging. So that saddens me.

I hope when the government are doing this and when we can get it into committee, we can talk about some of those things to ensure that those new Canadians are bringing all that they can. We've had a lot of great immigrants who have provided a great deal and contributed greatly to our wonderful province and country. I think we need to do more to encourage that.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand and comment on G49. It's hard for me not to think of Mr. Prue, of course, in the context of this bill because he spoke with such great eloquence around it. He was a former immigration officer and knew this file inside and out. He expressed the frustration, I think, that some of us feel—perhaps all of us on this side, anyway—that it has taken so long for this legislation to come forward. That said, of course we're supportive. This is a piece of legislation that needed to be updated and modernized, if you will, for quite some time.

I'm very supportive of some of the comments around updating the health regulations for health professionals. What a lost opportunity for us, not to welcome new immigrants with certain professional skill sets and not have them reach their potential in this province. I think that there are certain regulations contained within this piece

of legislation which will, of course, address that gap in service, and they're much needed.

When I was attending Harbord Collegiate, I was one of the only two Anglo-Saxon people in my class. Everything is context. When you grow up in a very multi-cultural and multi-ethnic community, that is your world until you leave it, and then you know how fortunate we are to live in this province and experience the diversity and culture. It is our strength, I do believe. When I left home and went to Cape Breton, I went to a high school called Sydney Academy. It was like going back in time, literally and figuratively, especially around the demographics of that area. It gave me a renewed appreciation for multiculturalism, which needs to be strengthened through this piece of legislation.

I'm happy to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. I return to the member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to wrap up this round of debate. I want to thank the Minister of Transportation, the member from Ottawa—Orléans, the member from Mississauga—Brampton South, the member from Timmins—James Bay, the Minister of Natural Resources, the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and the member from Kitchener—Waterloo with regard to their comments on this proposed bill.

Mr. Speaker, we know that every member in this House right now has some ancestry that comes from different places, unless we're First Nations. Having said that, I was very pleased to hear the member from Timmins—James Bay talk about Quebec—Quebec being the only province right now in Canada that has been granted the sole responsibility of selecting economic immigrants and refugees to their province.

If the proposed legislation is passed, it will provide the province of Ontario, known for its immigration practices, greater autonomy and more control on this whole immigration policy.

Our colleagues from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound and the member from Kitchener—Waterloo just mentioned the importance of regulated health professionals having their credentials so they can continue to pursue the profession that they've been trained for overseas. If this proposed legislation is passed, the RHPA will be revised, but more importantly, it will make sure skilled professionals have been trained to have the credentials they need—and furthermore, making sure of the timeliness of the decisions. There have been concerns raised about the lack of transparency and the timeliness of the approval process. If this proposed legislation is passed, Mr. Speaker, those pieces dealing with registration practices will be improved.

At the end of the day, I'm very pleased to hear all members of the House are supportive of the principle of this proposed legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's absolutely a pleasure and a privilege to speak to Bill 49, An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking all immigrants who are part of our cultural mosaic for all that they have contributed to our communities, our province and our country. I'm proud and privileged to live in the best country in the world. I'm proud of the diversity, the openness and the welcoming spirit of inclusiveness. And I'm honoured to wear the Canadian flag—and be recognized worldwide as a country that has open arms for all.

Up until recently, Ontario was welcoming about 135,000 immigrants a year, mostly to the greater Toronto area, Ottawa, Hamilton, London, Windsor and the region around Niagara Falls. But that number is slowly declining, and it sits at about 100,000 newcomers a year. The number of skilled immigrants settling in Ontario is dropping significantly. Today, newcomers are choosing provinces like Manitoba and Saskatchewan over Ontario. In those provinces, immigration rates have doubled because of bigger and better economic opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I'm saddened to say today that we have the highest electricity rates in North America. We have enormous amounts of red tape and regulation that, again, prohibit businesses from coming here, staying here and expanding in Ontario. We have the highest debt and deficit of all the provinces combined. That's not very inviting to businesses and certainly not to new Canadians coming to our country.

I think when they start looking at us—we used to be the economic engine; we used to be the land of prosperity and opportunity. Sadly, I believe today that because of the government's mismanagement over the last dozen years, we are not seen in the same light by many people. We are seen as an underserved community, in many cases. We're seen as someone who has their hand out, looking for federal transfer payments, as opposed to the province that used to be driving most of that.

It's a challenge to attract new immigrants to our wonderful province. I think they just have to look around and start comparing. Sadly, there's a lot of work that needs to be done to get us back there.

I'm proud of Ontarians. I'm proud of our resolve that we'll get back there. We're trying to do our best, on this side of the House, to push the government, to keep them accountable, to improve some of the ill-informed decisions they've made, so we can get back on track, so we can be that land of prosperity and opportunity for new immigrants, new Canadians, to come here again.

Cities like Saskatoon, Winnipeg and Fort McMurray are growing every day and attracting newcomers, who are filling labour shortages and helping grow the economy. Their growth is projected to persist, because they are in fact taking full advantage of their economic potential.

Since being elected and spending a bit of time in the GTA each week, I've had the pleasure of getting out to many different communities—Brampton, Mississauga,

Vaughan and Markham, just to name a few—and experiencing new and diverse cultures that I had never experienced before. They’ve been absolutely welcoming—

Mr. Bob Delaney: You came to Mississauga and you—

Mr. Bill Walker: Mississauga as well—I’m waiting for your invitation, Mr. Delaney.

I’m excited to meet with new Canadians, and I’m very excited to continue to be part of that outreach process. It’s important, I think, that we all work together and collaborate, to ensure that we have the best opportunities available.

I felt privileged, and continue to feel privileged, to hear personal stories about why people have chosen to make Ontario a new home for them and their families, and why they want to establish here and leave their own country of origin, to come here and make this truly their home.

My wife, Michaela, in fact, emigrated from England when she was about eight or 10 years old. We’ve been back a couple of times. It’s interesting, because she now says, “I’m not certain I would ever return to England as a full-time resident. I really, really appreciate everything that we have in Canada.”

I can only imagine, because I was born and raised in Ontario, Canada, and will probably never leave here, Mr. Speaker. I can’t imagine, really, for someone who was born in another country, how hard it must be to leave some of their own culture, or what they want to believe is their roots, and leave a lot of family members. But people are doing that, and I’m proud and pleased that they do that. Part of the reason for being a politician is to be able to ensure that we set the table, that we become, and continue to be, welcoming and open to all of the people who want to come and make Canada their home.

I take special interest in the stories about career and job challenges facing newcomers. It’s always interesting to ask someone, “Why did you come?” They say, “I came, and I’ve got a lot of background. I’ve taken my training. I was”—whatever it may be, from whatever occupational pursuit that they may have had in their own country.

It saddens me at times when I ask them, “Are you practising that profession here?” and they say no, and there is a myriad of reasons. Some of it is just a slow and bureaucratic process to get equivalent qualifications. I certainly respect, Mr. Speaker, and feel that we need to have balance, to make sure that there are equivalent criteria, but I do believe we need to be ramping up the process. We need to make that as efficient and as timely as possible, and not find administrative glitches to hold people back, particularly in the area—I’ve had the privilege since I’ve been here to be deputy critic of health care, and that’s one of the areas where we continue to hear that we have surgeons, doctors, family practitioners and specialists from across the health care spectrum that have come from their country of origin and are not able to practise here in Ontario, yet we continue to hear of

shortages in a lot of varieties of medicine out there. That’s just one.

I hear of engineers who have come here and have not been able to have the same designation, or get the equivalent, and be employed. I hear engineers who tell me every day—not every day, but certainly on an occasional basis—of trying to get that equivalent so that they can practise in their profession.

I think we need to ensure that we’re doing things in a timely manner. We need to be looking at those and making every effort. That’s why, in my last speaking to the member from Scarborough–Agincourt—I’m concerned that it has been 12 years of this government, and now we’re just getting to this. It would have been great to have known that they started this 12 years ago and it was a slam dunk and we weren’t still talking about just implementing it.

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For this reason, our caucus supported the move to have all candidates assessed before they arrive in Ontario. That would mean disclosing exactly what kind of opportunities await them in Ontario and, most importantly, what kind of professional upgrades they will need to be considered as a job candidate. This is not happening right now. As I’ve mentioned, we have doctors, engineers, nurses and a multitude of other professionals who don’t realize the employment obstacles facing them until they move their family here. This is costing us.

The Conference Board of Canada estimates that underutilizing their skills costs us between \$3 billion and \$4 billion in lost productivity. This is simply not fair to the applicants or to their families, and it certainly isn’t fair to us here in Ontario as well. We need to know exactly the type of people that we need to be attracting. We need to be fair and upright and straight with them, saying, “If you come and you have these qualifications, here’s what you’re going to need and here’s how long the time frame will be.” We need to ensure that those people aren’t given a false hope, move from their home to here to make a new home and we put them through that and they end up out doing a multitude of jobs that aren’t in their classification that they have to pick up.

To their credit, a lot of them will do whatever it is because they are just so happy—and you can see the passion on their face—and privileged and fortunate to be in a country like Canada and a province like Ontario.

But we need to do our job. We need to be fair so that it’s efficient and good for them. It’s much better for our province and our productivity, and, most importantly, it’s about them. They want to come. All of us should be able to aspire to do what we wish to do. We want them, particularly those with skills and qualifications who have spent that time and education and money and resources and the family commitment to become educated in a very specific occupation of their choice—we want to ensure that when they come here, we have an opportunity for them to practise that and, certainly, to maximize those skills and experiences.

A very particular specific issue is the provincial nominee program—and I'll reference it most of the day here—better known as PNP; although it will cut my word count a little, I'll do the acronym.

Nationally we have a yearly quota of allowing about 250,000 new permanent residents to settle in Canada. Ontario has asked for a bigger role in selecting which ones settle in Ontario and that its provincial nominee program, PNP, double its share to 5,000 from the current 2,500.

The provincial nominee program deals with fast-tracking economic applicants. This is a step in the right direction, but we need to clarify something. The problem currently with PNP isn't just the number of spots that Ontario has allocated—and I've alluded to this earlier in my address; it's that this current government is doing a poor job of making sure that the 2,500 spots are allocated to fit our economic needs. They're not doing a great job to ensure we're a thriving, prosperous province so that those people have the ability to find good, prosperous jobs and remain here in Ontario.

In other words, this government is doing a bad job of keeping the PNP applicants after a few years. People come; they're allowed and welcomed into Ontario, but at the end of the day, particularly in the last number of years, with the way things have gone economically, with the poor decisions and the waste that we see in our government, the debt and deficit that continues to climb, people are making choices to say, "You know what? Ontario isn't the land of prosperity," as other provinces may be compared. So they are leaving. They're going west. They're going to other provinces, and there are a number of reasons for that.

High taxes are certainly some of those—the overall cost of living in Ontario. They make other provinces that much more attractive. In this House, we've talked continually about the highest cost of energy in the country. In fact, in North America as a jurisdiction we've got the highest energy rates, and those are projected to climb three to four times again in the next four years. How enterprising is that for a family, particularly if they have to come and work in an occupation that may not be of their professional designation, where they may not be making the level of income that they were accustomed to or able to if they were in some of those professional occupations? It becomes very daunting for a family to say, "Do I stay here? Do I try to make a go of it or do I go somewhere like the west where things are more attractive, the rates are lower, in many cases, and the cost of living is lower?" And certainly, the oil sands were booming; they're slowing down a little bit, but there's still an awful lot of opportunity out there.

We want to ensure that Ontario, at the end of the day, doesn't continue to lag behind other provinces. We need to turn around some of our policy and thought processes. Certainly on this side of the House, it's part of our job as the official opposition to be critical where critical is warranted. Sadly, there's a lot of that; I could probably spend half the day talking about that. But we won't go

there. I'm not going to get off track today. I'm going to stick to the topic at hand. I'm going to talk about our immigration policies.

I just want to reinforce that again, a lot of people—we have the 2,500 quantity who are allotted to come to Ontario. The question is, can we retain them? At this point, I would challenge the government to ask if 2,500 a year are definitely staying in Ontario because we are the province that they purport us to be.

Our allocation of the provincial nominee program spaces should be higher, but before that happens, this government needs to prove that it can make effective use of the 2,500 spots it has now—make it a province where people want to say, "You know what? I'm not leaving here no matter what, because this is absolutely the best province."

If we can bring some of that administrative burden down, if we can bring some of our taxes down, if we, certainly, can bring energy rates down and stop demolishing, if you will, a lot of our industries—we've had 350,000 manufacturing jobs leave our province. They've decimated the horse racing industry. We've had fiascos like the gas plants, where we wasted a billion dollars. Those things can't continue if we're going to continue to attract the brightest and best immigrants, whom we want to come to our province.

This means, generally, that we need to improve the opportunities for new Canadians in Ontario. We need an environment that is creating jobs and improving foreign credential recognition for internationally trained professionals.

I support the idea of having a provincial registry to match employers with select workers. That's a good idea. We need to know that we need X, Y, Z of those. If there are people applying, those people should—and I think will—get priority because they're going to be able to walk right in, find a job and start becoming productive members of our community, of our society. Not only is that good for us, that's good for them coming in. Everyone wants to get up in the morning with a sense of purpose—that I belong and I'm making my fair contribution—particularly those who have made that huge, monumental decision, to say, "You know what? I'm coming to make this my home. This is going to become the home of my family for generations to come."

I understand this registry is mostly in response to the regulations being developed by the federal government and making Ontario compliant. I'm not really caring if that's the case. If that's what it is and that's what propelled them to do it, I'm okay with that, and I applaud the federal government for putting an initiative into place that's getting them to at least jump on the bandwagon and come up with this. This is also in line with recommendations from the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

Ontario's unemployment rate remains significantly high. We need to ensure that we're bringing in people with the skills and experience that we need to match the gaps that we currently have. There's no sense bringing in volumes of people who already have skills and qualifica-

tions in areas where we don't need them and leaving people out, who aren't able to access our country and our province, with skills that we need to fill those gaps.

The last statistic was that Ontario's unemployment rate has been above the national average for some 80 months—that's eight-zero months, Mr. Speaker—almost seven solid years of being above the national average. That can't be a stat that anybody in this House can accept and be happy with. This is because of the hit on our manufacturing base, which is where some of our new Canadians, certainly a lot of people coming here, look for manufacturing opportunities—there are a lot of skills in the skilled trades—and where most of the pink slips were handed out: namely, Heinz in Leamington, which was the second-largest Heinz plant in the world; Kellogg's plant; Caterpillar's Electro-Motive in London; General Motors; Ford; Linamar in Guelph, Canada's second-largest auto-parts maker, whose CEO herself declared, "Tens of thousands of shop-floor jobs are disappearing."

The reality is that all of these companies are still producing the product that they're famous for; they're just not doing it in Ontario anymore—a sad state of affairs. It's sad that they've moved out of those communities and moved jobs to other places. Ontario is no longer the leading car-producing province it once was.

Once upon a time in Ontario, back to the Davis years—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Okay, I think the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound has the floor, and I'd like to be able to hear him.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once upon a time in Ontario—and I can harken back to the Bill Davis era—Ontario was booming; everything was moving forward. There were lots of jobs and very low unemployment. The province was doing exceedingly well. We had shipments worth \$63 billion and production units of more than 2.5 million. Seven of the world's largest vehicle manufacturers operated 14 plants in Ontario. Sadly, that's no longer the case. Investors aren't creating jobs in Ontario because of high energy rates, red tape and administration, the debt and deficit—and a government that is under four OPP investigations cannot be helping. It simply is something that has to be looked at in light of a company that wants to come here or a new family that wants to come here and ask, "Is that the province?" when you see the spectrum of what we have across Canada, with all of our great provinces. We need to be the leader, we need to be the best and we need to set the bar higher. Like newcomers, they're looking to western provinces to set up shop, and they're doing it because of lower tax rates, a lower cost of living, less administration and just the pure fact of where they'll have more opportunity in the future.

In my next few minutes, I'm going to talk about co-operation with our federal counterparts. Our aging populations combined with our low birth rate means we have to rely on steady immigration to fill the gap. Ontario has expressed that it wants more control over immigrant

selection. Specifically, Ontario wants 70% of its immigrants to be economic class, as in the case of most other provinces.

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I'm pleased to see that the federal government has made extensive changes to Canada's immigration system, including the Federal Skilled Worker Program, the provincial nominee program and their termination of the provincial-territorial temporary foreign worker agreements in June 2015.

In January 2015, the federal government planned to introduce expression-of-interest immigration reforms to make the immigration system more responsive to labour market demands. This could increase the role of the province and employers in finding qualified immigrants to fill gaps in the labour market. The federal government is encouraging provinces to develop systems that will allow them to participate in the new expression-of-interest system.

Ontario must still jointly share that responsibility with the federal government, whether or not this legislation passes, but I'm pleased to see that the federal government is pushing it. They've identified it and are leading that charge. Regardless of why the current Liberal government has chosen to jump on, I'm pleased to see that it is.

A question that arises—and our caucus, under our critic, has not been able to get the details yet—is whether this proposal is revenue-neutral, as it establishes a government bureaucracy of inspectors and investigators. Yet again another program, another sound bite that sounds good, but is the devil in the details? As we've asked many times in this House of the government, in estimates committee, the supply motion debate just before that—a number of my colleagues asked questions about: How can you do this? Where are the facts? Where is the plan? What's the accountability measure that you're putting in place? This is one of those bills, again, that sounds good at the outset, but we need to understand: Will it be revenue-neutral? Is it going to cost us more than we can afford to implement it?

This government has mismanaged, as I said earlier, immigration policy for a decade, when it could have been working with the federal government to ensure that Ontario's economic needs were met by new Canadians. I'm not going to say that the government is only doing it because the federal government has forced their hand with the introduction of the 2015 expression-of-interest program, but it certainly looks that way, that it could be a component of why they finally stepped up.

It's a small nod in the right direction, Mr. Speaker. Ontario's inability to manage the economy and create jobs is deterring immigrants and certainly companies from coming to Ontario, necessarily, as their first choice. They are making other choices. Some are coming here, as I've alluded to in my earlier remarks, and they are not remaining in Ontario all the time. They're going to other provinces because of other economic opportunities that are there.

I talked a little bit earlier about the Regulated Health Professions Act amendment. As I say, I like this piece of it. I like that the bill amends the Regulated Health Professions Act to allow for the creation of regulations that speed up the process. There's no reason why we can't be talking to people and ensuring that they understand that there is a path for it, how quickly we can get them through there, and we expedite, particularly if it's merely qualifications.

In some of my work as deputy health critic, we've heard that other provinces accept the professional designation and yet Ontario puts them through more hoops and loops. That isn't to say that we will ever water down. We want the highest standards and the most stringent requirements. But I can't fathom that any of the other provinces are going to be thinking any less about the health and safety of their residents. So if there's something that four, five, six or seven other provinces have studied and said, "Yes, this meets it," why does Ontario have to continually hold back, lag behind and keep these people out of our workforce? There are wait-lists in health care that could be addressed with some of these people being able to get through the system, and we want to ensure that we do that in the most timely and effective manner possible.

We need to ensure that as we go forward, we get this bill to committee. We need to address the long-standing problem of ensuring that highly trained immigrants are able to work in their professional field when they move to Ontario. We only need to look to the statistics—30% of Ontarians are considered new Canadians and speak neither English nor French at home—to understand how important it is that we get this bill right.

As I stated in my opening remarks, Mr. Speaker, I am extremely proud to be a Canadian. I'm extremely proud to be an Ontarian and a Canadian in one of the most inviting cultural mosaics in the world. We are the best country in the world. We are open. We are inclusive. I'm proud that we're a province and a country that ensures that we allow others to come and make this their home, our home, and we collaborate together to ensure that that cultural mosaic is always there. I'll always fly the Canadian flag, as all Canadians will.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's a pleasure to rise in this House, on behalf of the people I represent in London West, to respond to the comments from the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound on the Ontario Immigration Act. I think that the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound had it right in terms of his focus in his remarks on labour market opportunities for newcomers when they arrive in our province. On Friday in London, I had the honour of attending the release of a labour market needs assessment that was conducted by the African Canadian Federation of London and Area. It looked at issues around the labour market integration of immigrants from African countries into London. One of the really troubling statistics they reported was that the unemployment rate among African Canadians in London is about 35%.

That's five times higher than the overall unemployment rate. This is an incredible loss of talent, skills and credentials that these newcomers are bringing into our community.

The other thing that the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound did not address, and that I think is important to keep in mind as we talk about International Women's Day, is the disproportionate impact of the immigration process on women. When we looked at the statistics that were presented on Friday, African women had even higher unemployment rates than men in our community—40% unemployment—and African women were more likely to say they felt disconnected and excluded from their community. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I listened with great intent to the speech by my colleague the honourable gentleman from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. But let me put Bill 49 in context from a Peterborough perspective. Saturday night, my wife, Karan, who is the hard-working principal at St. Patrick elementary school in Peterborough—I say hello to her in case she might be watching this afternoon—and I were at the Friends' Indian Dinner in Peterborough on Saturday night. Karan and I were doing a couple of Bollywood steps, which I won't say I was particularly good at.

What was interesting was to see the guests who were there that evening. These were individuals from the four corners of the world who have come to Peterborough for new job opportunities. They were cardiologists, radiologists and cancer care specialists who have come to Peterborough to practise medicine at the Peterborough Regional Health Centre. Beyond that, a group of engineers were there—again, coming from the four corners of the world. They're engineers at the GE Hitachi nuclear division, which is headquartered in Peterborough, and they're also employed at Siemens in Peterborough, another great success story.

I want to talk about the new director of radiology who just came to the Peterborough Regional Health Centre. This is an individual who came from Saudi Arabia and trained at Harvard and Stanford, but wanted to come to Peterborough, Ontario, to fulfill her destiny as director of radiology at Peterborough Regional Health Centre.

The notion that people from around the world are not coming to Ontario is frankly nonsense. Anytime the members of the opposition want to come to Peterborough, we'll do a tour and we can sit down and chat with these extraordinary individuals who know that Canada, or Ontario, is the place to be in the 21st century. This is a message that I'm prepared to take to all corners of Ontario. Thank you so much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to join the debate. What a fine speech by the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. It was—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Very inspiring.

Mr. Steve Clark: That's the right word, member for Simcoe North. It was very inspiring. I'm also glad that I get to follow the Minister of Agriculture. You know, I spoke to the minister earlier today about a petition response I got about Kemptville College. I talked to him specifically about what the government has done to Alfred College, and allowed for dollars to flow for a new cohort of students in 2015-16. I asked him specifically whether Kemptville College was also going to have that new cohort of students, because I think that's a key component to the future of agriculture education in Ontario.

When we talk about an immigration bill and the need to provide jobs and fill needs in our communities, it takes me back to a report I quoted on another bill, Bill 49. It was a report called Planning for Tomorrow for OAC; Input From Industry. When we talk about agriculture jobs, demand exceeds supply right now in the province of Ontario by three to one. For every three jobs that are there, we lack the supply of new students.

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When I talk about Kemptville College, one of the suggestions that comes forward is the fact that maybe we should be going out to foreign students. Maybe we should be looking to expand our horizons and our opportunities to keep that 97-year tradition continuing to serve students in the eastern Ontario agricultural population.

When I hear some of the debate, and I especially hear the previous speaker, the Minister of Agriculture, talk about jobs, I'm going to continue to apply what he says to Kemptville College because I really think the government needs to step up and make that commitment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's an honour to be able to follow the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and the member from Leeds-Grenville, because immigration, especially in agriculture—on a personal note, one of the reasons that I was forced to sell our dairy farm was because we couldn't find people. We could find people to work; we couldn't find people to manage it. There is a huge shortage in this province. The Minister of Agriculture and the Premier constantly talk about the jobs that agriculture is going to create. Do you know what? It's not going to create them if the people who have the qualifications to do them aren't there.

Is this act a step in the right direction? Yes, but I'm hoping that they're actually going to take this seriously. The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound brought up a point—if there's going to be any money spent here. It says that the minister "may" do this and the minister "may"—well, the minister should do some things because there are things here that need to be done.

Specifically in my riding of Timiskaming-Cochrane, people think that we're way out of the immigration loop when actually a lot of my riding has a mining component. I was knocking on doors in Cochrane in the last election, and at one door there were people from Argentina and next door were people from South Africa. I got into quite

a conversation with them. He was complaining about—this was last fall. He was complaining about the winter, how the winter was so terrible in Cochrane.

Mr. Steve Clark: I thought he was going to complain about the Liberal government.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, no. He was complaining about the winter in Cochrane. I said, "Well, sir, it's not that bad all the time. Last winter was a really bad one." He looked at me and he said, "Now I know that politicians are all the same in all countries. I've been here for three winters and they're all bad." It was an interesting conversation.

This is a really important subject. Everyone in this House has got something to do with immigration. At some point, we all came. Even the First Nations came, and that was before we really had policies, but Ontario won't grow without immigration.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We now have an opportunity for the member for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound to reply.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I go through the colleagues who have spoken on behalf of this, just one thing that I missed in my notes was that I had the privilege of working at Bruce Power, which really is a mosaic in an area like ours in rural Ontario that shows just what immigrants bring to our province, to our country and to the prosperity. They're wonderful people. They're very, very qualified and very skilled, and I think that's a model that we can all build from, to show we're bringing in people with very specified skills to fill what's needed, and those are very prosperous.

I want to thank the member for London West, Peggy Sattler. She echoed something that I have concerns about—five times higher than the national unemployment rate currently with this government. That's simply sad. We need to be very cautious, careful and strategic when we're bringing people in to fill the roles where there are gaps.

I want to thank the member from Leeds-Grenville, Steve Clark, and Timiskaming-Cochrane, Johnny Vanthof. They have both touched on that whole agricultural component—absolutely critical to our economy and critical to our community. I thank the member from Leeds for calling me "inspiring." That's a feather in my cap coming from you, our House leader—

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: That was me who said that.

Mr. Bill Walker: And also Mr. Garfield Dunlop from Simcoe North.

He talked about Kemptville College and Alfred College. There's a reality right now that there are three jobs available and only one person to fill them. Timiskaming-Cochrane jumped right on the back of that and said the exact same thing. So there are huge opportunities, but the government is failing in bringing in those people.

The Minister of Agriculture wanted to talk—and he did talk—about a great event in his riding and the wonderful things that are happening in immigration. Do you

know what? He's absolutely correct. There are a lot of great things happening, but just how much better could we be, Mr. Speaker? How many more health care jobs and services could we provide, how many more educational opportunities to provide those agricultural students with jobs that they want, how much more affordable housing and apprenticeships for the skilled trades—which are sadly lacking—if we were spending \$12 billion a year on those programs, services and opportunities, as opposed to interest payments on our debt?

It's a pleasure to work with my colleague Todd Smith from Prince Edward county and all of my colleagues with all of the immigrant communities across our great province. I look forward to doing it. I'm a proud Canadian and will always be inclusive and open to all of those new Canadians.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I want to recognize the member for Oxford on a point of order.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Mr. Speaker, I'd like the Legislative Assembly to recognize Russell and Carolyn Wilson from Salford, who are here this afternoon with their two boys, Scott and Derek.

I also want to point out to my nephew John that Russell is an expert in running dairy farms. He may want to talk to him before he gets away.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That was not a point of order but I enjoyed hearing it nonetheless. Thank you.

Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour always to stand in this House and to debate, particularly representing the culturally and racially diverse riding of Parkdale-High Park. In fact, at one point we were the most racially and culturally diverse riding in the entire North American continent. Because of gentrification, because of housing costs in downtown Toronto, that's not the case anymore. I know at Parkdale high school at one point there were 65 different mother tongues spoken—that's in one high school in my riding. That's how diverse we are.

I want to talk a little bit about the context of this bill and a little bit about our history as Canadians when it comes to do with immigrants. Of course, like everybody else here, I'm the daughter of immigrants. My father's side is Italian; my mother's side is English.

My grandmother came over at the turn of the last century. They settled in Lloydminster in Saskatchewan. They were homesteaders. My grandfather was a small-town doctor. There she was in the middle of the prairies, having come from a family of 12 children in England, to raising four completely on her own. It was a hard existence, and they survived.

My father came from Sicily, and arrived in Toronto. His parents started a fruit and vegetable stand on the Danforth, which, again, is a very common immigrant story. I don't want to focus on his experience. Again, they came over at the same time, the beginning of the last century.

At that time, it was the done thing—luckily it's gone now—where you tried to forget your mother tongue as quickly as possible—

Interjections: No, no.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Yes, it was. You tried to amalgamate; you tried to merge into the city.

Interjections.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The turn of the last century, my friends—the early 1900s.

There was incredible racism in the city of Toronto. Let me give you some examples of what was happening back then. Number one, on the boardwalk in the Beach, there were signs: "No Jews nor dogs." That was at the Beach. That's my father's Canada and the Toronto in which he grew up. In my father's Canada and the Toronto in which he grew up, as a semi-pro boxer and an Italian, he could walk in the back door of the Granite Club but he was not allowed in the front door.

My father, as a Roman Catholic immigrant, witnessed the birth of the United Church of Canada—of which I am a clergy member—in 1925. The bright side: It was a uniting church that was brought into being by an order of the government of Canada—if we could imagine such a thing. The shadow side of that was that one of the reasons all the Protestant churches were uniting was to fight back against the Roman Catholic immigration that was happening from southern Europe. He experienced that first-hand.

He also remembers the Christie Pits race riots in Toronto.

He also remembers a time when we turned away boatloads of Jewish immigrants fleeing from the impending Holocaust in Europe. We turned them away and we sent them back to certain death.

He also reminds me—and reminded me back then—of apartheid itself. That was, by the way, invented in Canada and exported to South Africa. They copied our system of reserves in South Africa.

So that's the backdrop. Whenever we speak about immigration and whenever we speak about racism in this House, I think we have to do a little mea culpa first before we continue on because that's also the backdrop in which we speak.

1600

Sadly to say, as we look at what's happening federally, we seem to be reverting a little bit back. I'm going to quote from an article that I think makes some very salient points about what is happening federally, because, after all, immigration mainly and mostly is a federal matter:

"Today, there are over 480,000 people entering the country as temporary workers," and these temporary workers don't have access to the most basic benefits. "Migrant workers can now legally be paid 5% to 15% below the average wage.

"At the same time, there are over 500,000 undocumented people without access to good jobs, health care, education, child care, housing, shelter, justice or dignity, living in Canada, most of them in the greater Toronto area."

I want to talk about one such family. I'm not going to mention their names, because they're still on the run. They lived in sanctuary in one of the United churches in my riding, and they lived in hiding. Why did they live in hiding and in sanctuary? Thank goodness for the goodness of strangers. Because the Harper government was about to deport them. Why was the Harper government going to deport them? Because they were Roma, Mr. Speaker.

One of the biggest groups that has come into south Parkdale in the last little while has been Roma immigrants. They are escaping some of the most repressive and racist laws in Europe, in the countries from which they come: Hungary, Czechoslovakia and others that have anti-Roma laws on the books. That's what they're escaping from. They escaped to a place they thought was going to be safe, that they thought was going to welcome them as refugees, with good refugee causes. Such was not to be the case.

This was after we had spent almost a million dollars in my riding, recruiting those who spoke Hungarian, translators for the children at schools.

As Harper began to deport the Roma from my riding, some 200 students from one school alone—now, think about what that means. Think about what that means, to have a place that you think is safe. You're a child with your family, and one day you're uprooted from school; you're uprooted from everything you know. You're on the run. You're either in hiding or you're living in a basement somewhere. You're trying desperately not to have the immigration forces find you and deport you. That was after being welcomed in.

That's what happened to Roma in my neighbourhood. We lost some 200 students from one school alone. We lost teachers as a result. It totally was disruptive. For the first time, it gave folk in my neighbourhood a really lived historical experience of what it must have been like to be, say, in Germany in the 1930s or 1920s, where your neighbours just disappear and you don't know where they've gone. You don't know what has happened to them. You can't say goodbye. They're just missing in action, and there is no way to find them and there is no way to contact them to even find out if they're okay.

That's what immigration looks like right now in Canada. That's what it looks like right now. It's not a pretty picture.

The family reunification program, under the current federal government, has been modified to actually deter reunification. Currently, there is a complete moratorium on parents and grandparents getting a visa. Again, this is a dramatic change in Canada in immigration. This is a dramatic change, from what we've been used to, as a welcoming country, to this.

Refugee acceptance rates have been cut each year, and halved in the last two decades alone. As of November 1, 2012, 68% of refugee applicants had been denied in the fiscal year 2012—68% of refugee applicants had been denied. So those are the stories, like the Roma stories from my riding.

For years, immigrant rights groups have called for the establishment of a refugee appeal division, as one was created by the Liberals but in fact never, ever implemented.

We have another galling example. Maybe we've forgotten this, but I'm going to remind us of it. In August 2010, nearly 500 refugee claimants arrived on the MV Sun Sea off the coast of British Columbia. Instead of allowing them access to the refugee determination process, they were jailed. Families were broken apart, and children seized by the Ministry of Family and Child Services. I mean, this is a vindictiveness; this is the arbitrariness of the refugee process at the federal level.

The latest attack, by the way, is Bill C-31, which gives the minister the power to single out for special punishment refugees who are suspected of having fled their country by means of smugglers. Mr. Speaker, it's not the refugees' fault—it's the smugglers' fault—yet the refugees are the ones that are being targeted.

You heard from the member from London West about the dire circumstances of those who are lucky enough to actually be settled here, to actually get jobs here. Migrants of colour, we know, earn 40% less than their white counterparts. In Toronto, the number of immigrants who are poor has grown by 125% over the past 20 years alone, and almost 60% of poor families are from racialized groups.

Another instance we remember since I've been elected: In December 2009, four migrant workers fell to their deaths in Toronto while working in unsafe conditions. In September 2010, two migrant workers died while working at an apple processing facility.

Remember, migrant workers are not allowed to bring their families. They're forced to be alienated. They're completely alone and completely at risk.

If we think those immigration raids are something that we see just south of the border—not so, Mr. Speaker. We see them right here; we see them in the GTA. They happen all the time.

I was sitting in Dufferin Mall one day and I saw a sweep. It was like something out of a movie. People came; we didn't know who they were. It's a place where many Portuguese gentlemen sit and have coffee and just hang out in the food mall at the Dufferin court. It's in the middle of a very Portuguese neighbourhood. All of a sudden, strange people came. They weren't necessarily in uniform. They were harassing these men. Nobody knew what it was about. They were asking for ID.

That's what a sweep looks like. It's scary; it's terrifying. It's not just men; it's women and it's children too. This is happening, and it's happening in our city and in our country right now. Do we have an issue? Yes, we have an issue, a real issue, with not only our image in the world vis-à-vis refugees and immigrants but the reality of that lived experience here.

Let me tell you, the provincial government isn't immune to the problems. One of the issues I've been raising since I was elected is the fact that we force newcomers to wait three months to be covered by OHIP. As far as I

know, we're the only province that does that. This is not only not compassionate; this is downright foolhardy and dangerous. We live in an era of Ebola. Imagine forcing newcomers to stay away from our hospitals, stay away from our doctors, and not give them coverage. This is ridiculous.

In fact, meeting with the Canadian Federation of Students—as I know many of us are today—they pointed out that it's even worse for international students. International students not only don't have newcomer coverage, as all newcomers don't, but they also have to pay if they're going to have coverage at all at any point, even if they're here for years and years. They pay through private insurance. Again, is that compassionate? It's not the case elsewhere in Canada. It is the case here in Ontario. Why do we do that?

Why do we charge them tuition when they create jobs? These are the same international students that tend to stay, graduate and work here, yet we're charging them billions more for tuition.

We're also forcing them to get private insurance. I thought that public insurance was something that the greatest Canadian, Tommy Douglas, fought for, and I thought that all Canadians were very proud of our public health insurance. Not so for international students, who are forced to go private. That's something we should be extremely ashamed of.

There are other instances, and I know that others have spoken about the lack of employment opportunity, the lack of being able to get into your chosen profession, as an immigrant.

Again, a story from my riding: this incredible gentleman, who's a surgeon who came from Iran and very much wanted to live here. He certainly wanted his children raised here. He moved his entire family here and was working as a baker. He was working as a baker, at just slightly over minimum wage, when he was a qualified surgeon in Iran.

He was told it would take him at least 10 years to qualify—he was already in his 40s—10 years to qualify. Of course, the qualification process was expensive. He couldn't work to support his family and also go through the qualification process and afford it, or have the time to do it, quite frankly. He was completely misled, and there he landed, in my riding, with his family.

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We tried everything. We tried to talk to the governing bodies, with no luck. Do you know what he does now? Do you know what he does now in the province of Ontario, where we are in desperate need of doctors? What he does now is travel back to Iran for six months of the year and works, and then he travels back here to be with his family for six months of the year. That's what we're forcing him to do when we need doctors. Most people don't have a GP, and yet we're forcing this very qualified immigrant to do that.

To the bill: Is it a step in the right direction? Yes, it is. My goodness, though, I've been here—I'm in my ninth year. For 10 years we've been waiting for something—10

years we've been waiting for something. For 10 years we've been waiting for the government to do anything on this file. Certainly, we should have a voice. My goodness, there are over 13 million people in Ontario. We are the centre for much of Canada's immigration, and yet this government has been silent on this file until now.

There are still some problems even with this. Recognizing that the federal government is really where immigration tends to happen, that still remains paramount. And there's nothing that guarantees the federal government will even go along with this legislation. Again, it doesn't address the long-standing problems of ensuring that highly trained immigrants are able to work in their professional fields.

It certainly doesn't say anything about the dire poverty into which many newcomers come. It doesn't say anything about housing. It doesn't say anything about the settlement services we have in our communities, which, by the way, never get stable funding. I know we're very aware of this problem with settlement services in our communities, some of which do get provincial funding—it's not all federal funding. They have to reapply and reapply and look for little loopholes and caches of money here and there because they're not the recipients of stable funding.

Why can we not grant stable funding, not just in the area of immigration and refugees, of course, but for all our social services? Certainly, where immigrants are concerned, it's a huge concern. Of course, this doesn't talk at all about non-economic-class immigrants. Again, whom do I see in my riding? I see a great many of them.

To get back to where we started, we come from a country that is really just one generation away from incredibly repressive—one might say racist—laws about immigrants. We're just one generation away from that. I'm the one generation away from that. We see a federal government that is reverting to the past in terms of their repressive measures around immigration. Let's face it: We are not the friendly, welcoming country we once were. We're not. We haven't been since Harper has been in power. And by the way, the Liberals before him didn't do that much either. But things are getting worse federally.

Finally, 10 years later, the Liberal government in Ontario decides to make a small step, and that's Bill 49. It is a good step, but it's a small step, and it neglects many of the issues that we've raised, many of the issues that affect the people in my community. The surgeon who is still going back to Iran to work six months of the year, the Roma family that is in hiding—it doesn't help them; it doesn't help either of them. It doesn't help the newcomers who come, possibly with diseases we don't know about, because they're kept out of our health care system for three months. Why is that? It's not only not compassionate, as I've said; it's downright dangerous. It's dangerous. Because they don't have the money to pay for the services, they're out of the loop.

The labour standards: Are we really looking at what our temporary workers or our migrant workers are living

through and getting? I've had many come into our office—I'm sure many of us in the downtown core have had these stories—where they're not being paid minimum wage, and where the labour standards are not being upheld. Why? Because they're frightened that if they speak up about an employer who is abusing them, they'll get deported—they'll be sent back—or they won't be able to get their spouse over. Something will happen.

This is not a happy situation, this is not a healthy one and this is not, I would argue, in the spirit of the Canada we like to present to the world. It's not a compassionate one.

As long as those stories exist right now in my community, I'd say that this bill, although it takes a small step, doesn't solve the problem. It doesn't begin to address the problems.

I look forward to amendments. I look forward, for example, to extending OHIP coverage to newcomers; that's the very least we could do. I look forward to the situation of international students being addressed, who have to get private insurance to be able to stay and who pay exorbitant tuition fees, where our universities and colleges are really balancing their budgets on their backs—of course, on the backs of those workers out on strike as well, but certainly on international students.

I look forward to a real conversation on the way that we vet the qualifications for international immigrants who come here with qualifications and can't work anywhere close to their fields. I look forward to all of that. Unfortunately, I don't see all of that in this bill. Let's hope they make it stronger, with lots of amendments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I listened very carefully to the comments from the member for Parkdale—High Park, and I certainly recognize that this is a very important issue related to her constituents, as it is to mine in northern Ontario as well, which I don't think is always as well understood.

May I say that I think I heard the member say that she would likely be supporting the legislation and that the party would be looking for some amendments. I know that the member remembers or recalls that in late 2012 the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration launched New Direction: Ontario's Immigration Strategy. This legislation, Bill 49, clearly supports very much the implementation of that strategy. The member outlined a number of priorities, and certainly they are for us as well, with recognition of the changes that are being made in terms of federal immigration policies and programs, and they are substantial and having, obviously, an impact. Again, I think that makes it all the more important that we have brought forward Bill 49. I think our previous bill was Bill 161, so this will indeed respond to that.

There obviously are so many key issues that in a two-minute one can't get into, other than, certainly, having a vision and objectives for immigration in Ontario. We're recognizing the long history of immigration to Ontario

and the extraordinary economic, social and cultural value of immigration to all of us.

Again, may I say that one recognizes how important it has been to the entire development of our province, but again, from someone who comes from northern Ontario, who watched the building and the history of our community being developed on the backs of so many immigrants, I can only say that we recognize how important this piece of legislation is and seek the support of all members of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: To the member from Parkdale—High Park, I listened very closely to her remarks and I'd like to compliment her on them, talking about Christie Pits and some of the events that took place in Toronto many years ago. I've read about it and—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: —was a tragic time in our place, yes.

In fact, in Sarnia—Lambton we border Michigan. You wouldn't think immigration would be a big issue there, but in fact my office has been working with a restaurateur there—East Indian food—and he has been having a real struggle to try to get a professional chef in there. We've been working to try to navigate our way through the provincial nominee program to secure one of those few spots. I'm going to talk about it more; I think I'm speaking to this bill today or tomorrow.

My riding is home to over 182,000 residents, and we have a greater percentage of adults over 50, I think, than anywhere else in Ontario. For the last number of years, there has been a consistent loss of young adults aged 20 to 29, mainly because of outward migration to either the western provinces or even the US because of the economy and because of opportunities in the oil and gas industry.

Now, some of those people, unfortunately, because of no fault of their own, could be returning home, but of course the local economy is suffering too. It could be better. I know that we're maybe in better shape in Sarnia—Lambton than others. But because of our connection to the oil and gas industry, that's why many young adults have left there.

Also, overall, Lambton county has a lower proportion of recent immigrants compared to the province, and visible minorities only represent 2.7% of our local population. However, that 2.7% is very important to that local population. Over the years, they've contributed, starting way back in the 1940s—I'll talk about that more in my full remarks—when they built Polysar, which was because of the war effort, replacing the rubber plants in Manila.

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Anyway, Mr. Speaker, we will be supporting this legislation when it comes to the floor for a vote, but we want to see it go to committee and be improved with many improvements and amendments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's indeed a pleasure to stand on behalf of the constituents of mine in Windsor-Tecumseh today. I'm especially proud this afternoon to follow the comments made by the member from Parkdale-High Park. I am so proud of the NDP caucus and its leadership, and Ms. DiNovo is certainly one of the leaders of our caucus. She comes with her point of view and speaks off the cuff for 20 minutes on issues that she has dealt with—let alone her nine years in the House—for a very long time in her community, one of the most diverse ridings in the entire province. She talked about the problems that immigrants have in this province.

I took a train home on Thursday night and caught a cab from the Walkerville station home. I was talking to my driver, who was originally from Lebanon. He came to Canada and studied biomedical engineering. He went to Polytechnique in Montreal, got his master's in biomedical engineering and is now driving a cab. He can't find work. He's well-trained, well-spoken, well-educated—and no jobs. That is a problem that many in our immigrant population have.

We encourage people to come to Canada. We welcome them with open arms, and rightfully so, and yet we don't do enough to help them find employment.

We don't put enough security, as the member from Parkdale-High Park has suggested, on the OHIP file as well. We make them wait until they can qualify for benefits.

The bill is good, the bill needs to be passed and the bill needs to be improved before passing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Han Dong: I have to say that I'm quite pleased to be able to stand and comment on this bill and on some of the members across who commented on this bill.

I'm perhaps the newest Canadian in this House, so this issue is dear to my heart. I have to say that I'm very excited about this bill, Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act. Ontario has come a long way. Some of us remember that, in 2006, we started with 500. We had a say in the selection of 500 to nominate to become future Ontarians, and then 1,000.

In 2012, as the Minister of Northern Development mentioned, we came up with a strategy that we went up to 5,000 in terms of selections for immigration. When you look at a province as big as Ontario—we welcome around 100,000 immigrants every year—5,000 is still a small number. This piece of legislation, if passed, will give us the tools to have a bigger say when it comes to what types of immigrants we're looking for in Ontario. We welcome all, but when you look at the economic immigrant percentage compared to the national average, we're way below the average. I think that's why we need a bigger say when it comes to immigration selection.

I just want to focus on one fine point I heard the member from Parkdale-High Park mention, and that is the international student portion. They contribute so

much to our society. With this bill, we will be able to attract more international students and convince them to stay. Quite honestly, they're one of the best kinds of potential immigrants we need in this country.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. I return to the member for Parkdale-High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Thank you, everyone who took part in this debate. Just a couple of issues: One of the things I didn't have a chance to say, especially in light of International Women's Day, is that of course there is a gender lens on this, because the ones who suffer most are the women who are newcomers to this country and new immigrants. One of the ways in which they suffer most is the very fact that Ontario will not extend OHIP coverage to newcomers for three months. That means that if a woman is trying to escape sexual violence, or trying to escape domestic assault, there is not that interface. She's not covered by OHIP—not to mention the communicable diseases that we should be concerned about. It's a danger to everyone. But on the file of wanting to do something about domestic violence and sexual assault, we fall flat when it comes to immigrant women and racialized women. So there's that.

The member from Trinity-Spadina talked about international students. Yes, we need them. So why don't we treat them well? Why don't we look at the amount of tuition we charge them and why don't we also look at extending OHIP to them? Because they don't ever get it. They don't have to wait for three months; they have to wait forever. They have privatized health insurance. We, sir, Mr. Speaker, are a country that believes in public health insurance. That's what makes us Canadian, in large part. Why do we not extend that to our international students? If we truly welcomed them, then maybe more of them would come here and more of them would stay here.

All in all, what can Ontario do? I decry the Harper government and what they've done. They've moved us back on the immigration and refugee file. There's no question that what they're doing is shameful. But what the Ontario government could do is to make larger steps forward. Yes, talk to the Harper government and tell them they're shameful. Yes, do more to combat the poverty and housing files and necessities for new immigrants. Finally, extend OHIP to newcomers like the other provinces do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's a pleasure to rise in the House this afternoon to speak to Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act. There's a very long history of immigration to this province. As others have said, with the exception of those who are First Nations, everybody in this House is an immigrant or a son or a daughter of immigrants or a grandson, granddaughter and so on.

Immigration to this province has brought great economic, social and cultural value over the generations. In fact, Ontario is the most multicultural province in this

country. More than half of all new immigrants make this province their home.

Ontario has a very strong reputation as being a land of opportunity. It's a prosperous democratic society built by the hard work of generations of immigrants. I have to relate that to my own family. My parents immigrated to Canada from Poland. They immigrated to Quebec. They settled in Montreal. My father was an engineer. After a few years of working in Quebec, there were not the opportunities for professional accreditation back then in the 1960s in the province of Quebec that there were in Ontario. So he and my mother moved to Toronto, where he was able to fairly quickly have his engineering credentials from Poland accredited and become a professional engineer here in the province of Ontario.

That speaks very well to the approach that this province has always taken of welcoming immigrants and giving them the opportunities that they so rightly deserve to try to make the most of their skills and their abilities.

This legislation is a very necessary first step to Ontario being able to chart our own course when it comes to attracting more skilled immigrants to drive our economy and keep Ontario strong. If passed, it will put the necessary tools in place to help Ontario welcome the skilled immigrants it needs to meet future labour demands as well as improve compliance and enforcement measures and increase the transparency and information sharing to improve immigrant selection. These measures will lay a foundation for Ontario to operate a larger and more robust immigration program now and in the future.

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On the subject of accountability, I'd like to speak to how this bill continues to reinforce the government's commitment to transparency and accountability.

This bill ushers in changes that will greatly improve the decision-making mechanisms when it comes to the provincial nominee program. The provincial nominee program is an immigration program through which Ontario nominates individuals and their families for permanent resident status based on a pre-approved job offer from an employer in this province. The bill proposes to remove the existing ability to waive eligibility criteria for this program, thereby making it more equitable and fair for all applicants.

Often, people wonder why Ontario is engaging in this. Surely, immigration is just under federal jurisdiction. But this bill shows how provincial action on immigration can be very relevant, even though it's really part of a federal responsibility. Immigration is a shared responsibility, and the provinces have an important role to play. That's especially true, because this is the number one destination for newcomers in Canada. Our government believes that a strong partnership between Ottawa and the province is a key to the successful integration of newcomers into our communities and our workforce.

Immigration is inextricable from the economic strength of this province, and the 2013 budget affirmed that Ontario's Immigration Strategy will respond to the province's demographic and economic realities, and the

province will be proactive in attracting the best and the brightest in the world to Ontario and helping immigrants and their families to settle and prosper.

That's exactly what we are doing with this bill: We're being proactive on immigration. The types of opportunities that were afforded to my parents' generation, when they came to this province, will continue to be afforded to future immigrants to Ontario.

I'll be sharing the balance of my time with the members from Scarborough Southwest, Beaches–East York and Sudbury.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the member for Scarborough Southwest.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It's a pleasure to be able to speak this afternoon to this bill involving immigration and other points as well.

I guess what we're just trying to do is establish more power, or more authority, when it comes to the immigrants that come to Canada and, especially, that come to Ontario. Right now, most of it is done federally. Quebec does it differently. They can filter out, or decide which immigrants to Quebec should be allowed in. I think what we're trying to do with this bill is copy that, but not as much as Quebec.

I understand Quebec's position, where they want mostly French-speaking people to come to their province. In Ontario, we want people to come to the province, and we want to be able to provide them with language training and other skills as well, so they can integrate faster into Canada and into Ontario. I think it's a reasonable request. It makes a lot of sense. This bill, if passed, hopefully, will catch the attention of the federal government, and they'll say, "You know what? Ontario is right. They should have more to say when it comes to immigration."

The other issue that I want to bring up, because I only have a few minutes to speak on this bill, is my own personal experience. As the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore just said—my parents were also immigrants, but they weren't from Poland; they were from Italy. My father came to Canada in 1953. He was 22 years old. He worked hard. After four years, he went and grabbed my mother, who was in Italy, because it was expensive for two people to live here at that time. He brought her to Canada, and eventually they would buy a house. They stayed here, and they had five children and raised a family.

The beautiful thing about Canada, and the beautiful thing about Ontario, is that everyone has an opportunity to do well. I never felt that more than when I was called to the bar. When my parents came to this country, there were no restrictions. It wasn't, "You know what? You've got to go up north and work on the farm or work in the lumber yards and cut down trees" or something of that nature—or become a miner. My dad was able to choose what he wanted, and I was able to go to law school and graduate and become a lawyer here in Ontario, as well as becoming first a city councillor and then a member of Parliament. There were no restrictions, which is the

beautiful thing about Canada: Everyone has the opportunity.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: How many years had you been a councillor?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I go back to 1988. I was elected as a councillor, as my friend from Brampton West tells me. It's a long history. I'm now into my 27th year as an elected official: 15 at the city and almost 12 here at the province. There are no barriers saying that a person who comes from a certain country can't do things. But it would have been helpful if my mother and father had language training.

My dad learned English while he worked at a lumberyard, talking to some employees who spoke English. My mother—it's kind of a funny story—stayed at home to watch the kids, and she always said to me, "I learned English by watching I Love Lucy shows." I guess that's the way she learned, as others do too. The other one was the Three Stooges. I don't mean to crack a joke here, but she was probably the only female I know who liked the Three Stooges. She would watch them and get a good laugh, and she learned to speak English.

So, every opportunity is here. What Ontario is trying to do is make sure they can help out too in the program so that everyone can learn and become an immigrant in this country, and especially in this province, who can contribute to the country the way I have the opportunity today and the way my father did, working in a lumberyard for 35 years, and how my mother did, to be able to raise five children. She kept a good eye on all of us and made sure that all of us were well educated and able to leave the nest at home and move on with our lives being perfectly skilled or perfectly prepared to face the challenges of the outside world.

My time is limited. I could speak for hours on this. I think that Bill 49 is really important. If Quebec can do it, I think Ontario should have the same right at the end of the day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnett): The member for Beaches—East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I too am delighted to follow my colleague from Scarborough Southwest, whose riding is directly east of mine, Beaches—East York, to speak to this bill, Bill 49, An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act.

How appropriate it is that this bill has been brought forward by the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade, himself a new Canadian who came to Canada and established himself and established roots in our country as a country of choice, where he now has an opportunity to go forward on a revised immigration strategy for Ontario under his leadership and tutelage. I would like to thank the member profoundly for his work in this regard.

I too am the child of an immigrant. My mother came here in the mid-1930s from Brighton, England, settled with her family and met my father, who was actually originally from Saskatchewan. But his father was from

Edinburgh—so some Scottish heritage—through Cornell University, where he studied agriculture. He was a professor of dairy husbandry, which I may have mentioned before.

He came to this country and settled in Saskatchewan, because that way he could be close to the sweetheart he had met and married, who lived in Montreal. I used to say that my grandfather knew much more about agriculture than he ever did about geography, because he settled so far away from her. But they had an opportunity to come here and make lives for themselves.

Now, having come from Great Britain, I appreciate that the challenges they faced coming to this country weren't nearly those we see with so many others who come to Canada nowadays. In my own riding of Beaches—East York, I'm delighted to say that we have a very vibrant multicultural community. I have a number of community organizations in Beaches—East York, like WoodGreen Community Services, Bengali Information and Employment Services, Bangladeshi-Canadian Community Services, Bangladesh Centre and Community Services and Neighbourhood Link, which provide invaluable assistance to new Canadians as they come to Canada and become Canadian citizens, to help them integrate, to help them with employment, to help them with housing and help them with all the important social measures they need so they can fully integrate into our society.

If you were listening closely, you would have noticed that three of those organizations are of Bengali origin. That's no secret in my neighbourhood, because in Beaches—East York, particularly in the northern part of the riding, Bangla is the second most widely spoken language, right after English, of course. About 58% of the residents in the last census indicate that English was their mother tongue, whereas the Bangladeshis, about 7%, speak Bangla as a first language.

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What we've seen as a result of that is an incredible richness in that community, as being the highest concentrations of Bengalis in Canada. I have had the chance, and so many opportunities, to integrate with them in a number of adventures, not the least of which was that we celebrated just yesterday at the East York Community Centre, as they unveiled a new design for a monument for International Mother Language Day. This is a program that they've been initiating over the last five or six years with strong community support.

They were able to reveal the winner of the design, Mr. Monir Hossain, with his colleague Apurbo Bhoumik. What was incredible about this design is how it so closely resembles the monument in Dhaka with a great Canadian spin, because this is a monument that will represent all Canadians and their mother languages. Mr. Hossain, it is interesting to note, was the very first person in Bangladesh, before he came to this country, who could use computer-automated design software: AutoCAD. He self-taught himself AutoCAD back in Bangladesh, and then was able to immigrate to Canada and was able to get

work in Canada in this new, emerging world of AutoCAD.

I was delighted to be able to meet with him and see this exciting, exciting design that he'd been able to put forward, and what an honour, as he spoke at great length about the great honour that he, as a new Canadian, having chosen Canada, has been benefiting from the opportunities we've provided in a multicultural world.

It's no secret, and in her previous statement the member from the opposite side talked about some of the difficulties new immigrants and refugees may be having in Canada nowadays under the current administration. Because so many of the people we're speaking of now came here under rules that were introduced through the 1960s and 1970s and benefited from the great work done by Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the Liberal government of the day. We're hoping to see more of that. This bill will give us an opportunity to set a framework of discussion with our federal counterparts, and we look forward to seeing its speedy passage so that we can get on with this important business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Sudbury.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'd also like to thank my honourable colleagues from Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Scarborough Southwest and, of course, Beaches-East York for their great presentations.

It's my pleasure to rise before my colleagues to further the debates on Bill 49, the proposed Ontario Immigration Act. I would like to focus my presentation today on the work that this government is doing to help newcomers find jobs that match their skills and experience, and on how our proposed bill will strengthen these efforts. This is something I hear about in my community almost on a weekly basis, when I visit facilities like the Sudbury multicultural society and other organizations that are working to try to ensure that they can find this work, those types of jobs, for immigrants that match their skills and expertise.

Now, if we are to achieve our immigration goals in this province, we need to improve foreign qualification recognition for internationally trained professionals. Further to that, Mr. Speaker, we must strengthen the settlement and integration programs that we have in place to help immigrants succeed.

Ontario's immigration strategy clearly articulates the need to strengthen these programs as a means to growing an economy that is globally connected. For example, our Ontario bridge training program helps thousands of immigrants each year to get licensed and find work in their fields by providing training and valuable connections to their sectors. Just last year, Mr. Speaker, our government committed \$63 million over three years to support Ontario bridge training because we know how vitally important it is.

One of our goals is to get highly skilled immigrants out of what we call "survival jobs" and into the workforce at their full potential: get them out of the cab and back into the lab, as we say. So Bill 49, if passed, would

align requirements in the Regulated Health Professions Act with those in the Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act, Ontario's landmark legislation that continues to address the recognition of foreign credentials. This means that registration practices must be transparent and objective, and that decisions must be made in a timely manner.

These proposed changes underscore our commitment to increasing the number of immigrants licensed in their professions. We want to increase the percentage of internationally trained professionals who get licensed in this province. Like I said, the faster we can get people working at their full potential, the greater the benefit to Ontario.

Ontario's labour market is diverse. Changes are happening in local economies that are making us think about the way that Ontario looked yesterday, what it looks like today, and how it will look in the future. What we know for sure is that Ontario needs skilled people to take us forward. By passing this piece of proposed legislation we will be more attractive to the skilled immigrants that we need in the future and we will strengthen our ongoing efforts to make sure skilled immigrants can work in their areas of expertise.

I can talk a lot about Sudbury and the great work that many of our small businesses are doing in our community when it comes to mining, specifically. What we need are more skilled immigrants who can come to our community and work in the mining profession. We see so many of our new immigrants coming and looking for this opportunity to be paired with this great job, and the jobs are out there. This government is working hard on creating those great jobs, and it's working.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: The Ring of Fire.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: The Ring of Fire is a great example. Once that starts moving forward, we're going to be able to start moving on that.

Let's help more skilled immigrants get their licence or certification or connect to their sector so that we may increase their opportunities to resume their careers here in our province. Let's maximize the benefits of global talent; let's maximize the benefits of Ontario.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this bill today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It has been a delight to listen to four members of the Liberal caucus over there. I'm just going to try to summarize all of their comments quickly. I'm going to start off with the most recent speaker from Sudbury stating just how wonderful the Ring of Fire is.

Interjection: It's on its way.

Mr. Bill Walker: On its way? So is Santa Claus. It has been 12 years. How much longer do we have to wait? Cliffs has left the province; have you not noticed that? I can't believe you're that delusional. If immigrants are using that as their poster board to come to Ontario, we'll never have another immigrant come to this province in the next 20 years.

"This is the land of opportunity," is what another one said. They've had 80 months of higher unemployment levels than the national average. How much confidence does an immigrant have coming to our province hearing those types of stats?

What I want to know is how accountable they'll be when they do this. It's great to ensure that we have opportunity. Absolutely; we're all on board that there needs to be opportunity, but certainly their actions do not meet what their words are.

We've had 350,000 manufacturing jobs leave the province of Ontario. Those are jobs that immigrants wanting to come to this great province and country of ours could be looking forward to.

The highest energy rates in North America, the highest taxes, the highest levels of red tape and bureaucracy: We need to ensure that we have the environment.

I am pleased to see the act come forward. I am pleased to hear a number of the members over there talk about working with the federal government. That is a nice change, rather than dissing them and slamming them at every opportunity.

I'd like to suggest that it would have been nice in their 10- to 12-year reign of power that this immigration problem would already be here, not "It's coming" like the Ring of Fire. "It's on the way." Holy smokes. I just can't get over that they actually believe that that Ring of Fire is their panacea to solve the world's ills. I truly hope that the immigrants do have opportunities to come to Ontario. We need them, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I'm pleased to stand on behalf of the people I represent in London West to respond to the comments from the members for Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Scarborough Southwest, Beaches-East York and Sudbury.

I really want to focus my brief comments on the remarks that were offered by the member for Sudbury, particularly around bridge training programs. Just this January, January 2015, the Fairness Commissioner released a report. She really focused on the requirement for Canadian experience as a huge barrier for immigrants to enter the workforce, and called for all regulators to remove the Canadian experience requirement except in very rare circumstances. This repeats a call that had been made earlier by the Ontario Human Rights Commission. We know that this is a real barrier for newcomers to integrate into the labour market and that bridge training programs can ease that transition.

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Unfortunately, the funding that is provided for bridge training programs is not sustainable. These programs start up and they close down, and there's little certainty for immigrants as to where these programs will be offered and when they will be offered. They're also very, very expensive. It can cost up to \$12,000 for tuition to participate in a bridge training program. So saying that

these programs are available is not the solution to help immigrants integrate into the labour market.

The Fairness Commissioner also called for sustainable funding for bridge training programs, which is something that we need desperately if we are going to really assist newcomers to integrate into the Ontario labour market.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I'm pleased to join the debate today on Bill 49, a bill to establish the Ontario Immigration Act. As the minister says, this bill is very important for newcomers and for employers and is vitally important for Ontario. More importantly, passing Bill 49 would make Ontario more competitive by attracting the skilled workers that we need to fill our labour force and grow our economy.

Attracting, supporting and retaining skilled workers to fill our workforce is critical to stabilizing our economy, so we need to lay out the welcome mat, and a large part of that involves helping newcomers settle and succeed.

In our riding of Kingston and the Islands, the work that we have done through the immigration services Kingston network has been very positive. I've seen the work that they have done through the federal office that I was working at formerly, and I've seen them benefit on a daily basis.

We do need to work with the federal government, as the Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound member has stated. I fully support that. It's absolutely critical that we get the recruitment, the selection and admission of skilled workers.

For example, internationally trained professionals come to Ontario hoping to find work in the field that they've studied in their homelands. I've had many conversations with newcomers to Canada who have expressed great frustration over the past years at not being able to find employment, and I think that this bill is going to go very far in terms of helping them in their plight.

All too often, skilled newcomers have experienced barriers and hurdles that prevented them from becoming established. Our government is committed to removing these barriers to internationally trained professionals practising in their fields.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: It was interesting to hear the remarks from the members for Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Scarborough Southwest, Beaches-East York, and from the member for Sudbury, our newest member. I should add that I enjoyed hearing all the personal stories about all the different members, their families, how they came to be here. Their families came here as immigrants and obviously succeeded and have been very successful in their own careers—their parents or themselves—as first- or second-generation immigrants. That's the best part of being here in the House, I think: hearing those personal stories. I think we should do more of that and maybe less of some other stuff.

Anyway, over the winter recess, I had the opportunity to attend a talk by the chief economist at the Central 1 Credit Union in Sarnia that was put on by the local chamber of commerce, who, by the way—I didn't intend to bring this up—are visiting Tuesday and Wednesday in this House. We're going to have a Sarnia-Lambton day, so I'll throw that in there.

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: You're all invited. We're going to have a reception on Wednesday.

Mr. Bill Walker: Any food at that one?

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, there will be some food from Sarnia-Lambton.

Looking at the demographics, Mr. Pastrick, who was the speaker, noted that despite the relatively low immigration rate compared to the province, the migration of people outside of Ontario to Lambton county was the second-biggest contributor to our population and the population stability of our county and my riding, the basic part of my riding. Mr. Pastrick also indicated that while Toronto and larger urban centres in Ontario continue to draw away those Ontario-born residents, there is still an opportunity for those communities in other areas to thrive if there's a helpful system to help transition new residents into their communities.

Also, right now before I lose my time, I'd like to highlight the great work that Lambton College in my riding is doing in attracting nursing students and other students from around the world to their campus. Lambton College has world-class programs, and anybody interested in working in the energy sector or health care can speak to that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): One of the government members has two minutes to reply. I recognize the member for Beaches-East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure to be able to respond on behalf of my colleagues from Etobicoke-Lakeshore, from Scarborough Southwest and from Sudbury and to thank the members opposite from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, London West, Kingston and the Islands and Sarnia-Lambton for their comments. But I would like to focus specifically on the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound for his most bellicose, but spirited, comments.

It continually surprises me how the member opposite can be so supportive of what we're doing and critical at the same time. Had you thought about what this Legislature looked like in the last term, you would have realized that, had there been more co-operation on the other side, so much of this work would have been accomplished earlier, faster, back then. A lot of the bills that we've been debating in this House have been bills that have come up two or three times that, because of the dissolution of this House, they didn't cover. Some talk about forcing that unnecessary election, which of course I don't quite see that way.

But I would also like to talk about the comments from the member from London West, who talked about the bridge training programs, obviously a very, very import-

ant part of the Ontario immigration strategy and something that flew out of the previous work that this government was doing to try to enhance opportunities for new Canadians as they come here.

I know in my own community of Beaches-East York, there are so many people in the Bengali community who are agricultural specialists. So when we talk about the issues of education and opportunity, we are bringing people from around the world who want to work more in this sector, and it's very, very important that we do get them into continuing education in Alfred College and Kemptville, with the co-operation of all members, and those opportunities. We should be able to find a way to do this.

This is where this government is heading with this bill. It does set a framework, and I appreciate the support that we're getting from members opposite, the details to follow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there have been more than six and one half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader or his designate indicates otherwise.

I recognize the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We wish the debate to continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I get the 20 minutes too? Okay, good. I've got a really detailed speech here, so I want to make sure we get everything in.

Mr. Speaker, it's a real pleasure to rise today to speak on Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act. Clearly, I think we know everyone is supporting this bill today. Anything to do with our immigrants and the success we've had in Ontario and in our beautiful country is mainly the result of the immigrants who came here.

Of course, we're all immigrants. We were all immigrants at some point, other than our First Nation brothers and sisters. And I want to get to that as well, because I think there's an area where we have dramatically let down our First Nation brothers and sisters. As we brag about an immigration act, I think we'd actually better really remember some of the problems we've got with our very first First Nation brothers and sisters, who were here for thousands of years.

I want to talk a little bit about Simcoe county. Simcoe county was established, I think, 18 years before the province of Ontario was formed.

1700

We look at the families that moved to Simcoe county, starting with John Graves Simcoe signing documents and working with First Nation organizations and First Nation peoples to actually allow people to come primarily from the British Isles—Irish, Scottish, English, some Welsh. Those are the original people who came in the late 1700s

and 1800s. If you look in any of the history books written on the county of Simcoe, you'll find names that are there today—Dunlop, for example. Our family is from Scotland. There's actually a town in Scotland called the kirk of Dunlop; it's just outside of Paisley. That's where my dad's family came from in the late 1700s. In fact, the one—I think his name was Daniel Dunlop—who came in that time frame is buried in the St. Lawrence Seaway area. When they created the seaway, they actually had to move graveyards to accommodate, so they would still be in existence.

We look at all of the work these people did. If you go into some of these communities, you can see. We talk about agriculture today, and we look at the kind of equipment we have to work with: tractors and combines and plows. The guys who came here, the people who came to this country and took huge woodlots and had to take the timber down just to use the soil—it's the same sort of work ethic that built our railroad.

I was saying to my wife just the other day, "If there ever was one thing we really got right in our country, it was the railroads." Really, when you think of the work that was put in with horses and some immigrants from other countries as well—but how the beds of those railways, right to this day, are staying solid and firm. The kind of backhoes they would have worked with in the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s would have been like miniature little toys compared to the kind of equipment you'd see working on any of these high-rise sites today. There was nothing to them. Yet they built it; they built it right. They didn't have tons of consultants and engineers and architects. They went ahead and built that railroad right across this huge country, and they're still running those trains today, only the trains are a lot larger and a lot bigger, and they are moving billions and billions of dollars a year in commerce.

I'm getting a little off track here, but I'm talking about the people who came here looking for jobs.

The same thing applied to our farms. If anybody knows the Mount St. Louis Moonstone ski resort—I think many of you have probably been there. It's three minutes from my house. My dad's farm, where my dad was raised, was at the top of that ski hill. What they did is, 30 years or so ago, Josl and Elfriede Huter bought that farm off my grandfather—

Interjection.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Pardon me?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's been downhill ever since.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: No.

What they did with that farm was, they dug out most of the 100 acres into a huge pond. If you look at those hills from Highway 400, if you're going by, you'll see the hills have been raised much higher, probably another 200 feet higher because of that. They took it out of that farm at the back. The original farmhouse and barn are still standing at the back of the property. You can see them if you're up there skiing. I show my kids and my grandchildren all the time. When I go skiing up there, I show them.

That's where that family was raised. They picked rocks. They raised enough to get the crops ready. They barely survived, but you know what? They didn't draw any kind of social assistance or anything. They worked hard and raised their families there. That's the way all of that area was done around there.

I just want to say a little bit more about that farm, Mr. Speaker. Because of all the environmental rules, what they've done with that hill is, they banked the sides of the hills with clay, and then they pump water up there from the springs. That's the same water that makes snow. They've got literally hundreds of millions of gallons of water stored there for snow-making equipment. That's the type of thing, the sort of innovative thoughts on one piece of property that has happened throughout the years. We've got those kind of examples all across our ridings.

The same thing applies to other areas of Simcoe county. I look at Oro-Medonte, at Tosorontio, at Clearview, all those areas where there have been mega-farms put in over the years and all kinds of people have worked really, really hard. Most of them are from those British Isles descendants. Those are the people we see in Simcoe county.

But more recently, of course, we've seen a lot of the Dutch community, particularly in the last 50, 60 years, people who came from Holland—I know that Ernie is not here right now, but I can tell you that the Dutch are incredible farmers. You just have to look at the Holland Marsh. If you look at the Dutch families around Simcoe county, you can almost tell they're Dutch when you look at the farm from the road. They have the driveways lined with flower beds and gardens along the driveway into the barns. Everything is neat around the barns.

I look at families like the den Haan family down in Tosorontio, who have now got a cheese factory on their site as well. I look at different families that I've met over the years. These are families who came here with nothing. They didn't ask for anything. They slowly got little jobs and they bought a piece of property. They raised their families and now the families are successful and the families are buying more and more properties. We see that all the time.

That's what makes Canada great. When you see these types of people who came here looking for one chance, one opportunity, to do something that would make life better than what we they had in Europe, these are the real success stories.

Come to the city here. What would we have done without the Portuguese and the Italians working with concrete? They have built the city. I mean, the underground work that's been done here—miles and miles of pipe have been put in. All of those guys who came here looking for their first job working on construction sites were all people who said, "Look, it's an opportunity here and I want my kids to do better." In many, many cases, the kids have done much, much better. They've gone on and they've gotten good education and they've been able to buy properties. Some of them have gone into development industries. But the one thing is, they haven't asked

for anything. In most cases, they've worked really hard to get where they are.

I look at some of my friends up in the Orillia area. I think of the Greek families. We have a lot of people in our area who are of Greek descent and who operate restaurants—fantastic restaurants. You see them build these restaurants or dining rooms or steakhouses, whatever they may be, and you just know it's going to be a huge success. It's not one of these ones where they're in and out and gone out of business overnight. They are there and they work hard and they tend to create a lot of jobs in their communities as well.

I can think of people like—I wrote some of their names down here—the Town and Country Steakhouse in Barrie. I know that Ann over there has probably been at the Town and Country a number of times. I'm a Town and Country fan—a Greek family.

There's Theo's Eatery in Orillia and the Bayside restaurant at the curling club in Orillia. Tops in Pizza: This guy, Jimmy Marinakos, every year at Christmas for 25 years, has opened up his business. All day long on Christmas Day, whoever wants a pizza in Orillia can go down and get a pizza made by Jimmy and that's his Christmas gift to his community. The guy works his heart out all the time. That's the kind of people we've brought. I like to brag about these kinds of people because I think it's important that they are acknowledged because they are immigrants. Again, they came here with nothing and they've made success stories of themselves. They bought nice houses and their kids are doing well. It's always nice to hear that.

I've been doing a lot of work in skilled trades and apprenticeship reform, and I'm now the critic for education and training, colleges and universities. I've had quite a few chances to tour a lot of the facilities. I'd like to actually mention some people I've met as well. I'm thinking of a gentleman in Sudbury. I don't know if anybody knows this gentleman, Milad Mansour of Milman developments. He came here from Lebanon. He came to Toronto and couldn't find work in Toronto, so he went further north. He went to Sudbury. Milad, I believe now, has around 1,200 employees and a number of companies in the Sudbury area. It's just a huge success story. If you go up to Sudbury and you ever get a chance to tour any of his companies—he does a lot of work in the mining industry and in the rail industry. He's just a great person. I think he's probably in his mid-seventies right now but still is a dynamic guy.

1710

Here's a guy who came from Lebanon. When I first talked to him, I said, "I can't believe you came from Lebanon to Sudbury." He said, "Yes, but I made a great career out of it, and it's been a wonderful time."

A couple of things: I wanted to go back to the member from High Park—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Parkdale—High Park.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: —Parkdale—High Park. You made a couple of really good points that I picked up on today as well with the students when I met with them.

These are the international students that we have here. Today, most of the colleges and universities are counting on international students because they pay more money. They pay the full shot. They're paying more money to come to colleges and universities all across the province. We're starting to get a bit of declining enrolment in the college and university system, so they're in demand. But you know what? I could not believe it. They don't get the same kind of health care.

If a college student gets appendicitis or something like that, or they get sick, they have no insurance. I'll tell you, that's something that's got to be changed. Very few of the kids do get sick when they're at that age, but let's face it: There should be something in our system that would allow them to actually—because they're paying top buck here. They're paying top dollar to the colleges and universities. There should be a better system for those students so they can be treated without going into debt even further, because they're paying thousands and thousands of dollars more to come here than the students who are here.

I think it's important that we zero in on some of these things and listen to what these kids are saying. I've had this a number of times as I've toured some colleges and universities. Different international students have actually asked me about that. When the student union came today and said, "This is a problem we've got," I think it's something that the government should accommodate in the budget, when the budget comes up, because if we're talking about a bill like Bill 49, there have got to be things that support it, and some of the things that should support it are things in the budget that we bring up in the House. We're still going to vote for this bill no matter what happens, but the reality is that we want to make sure that these little things we bring up in the House are somewhat addressed.

That brings me to another thing that's happening in my riding this summer, and that's our Franco-Ontarian friends. This is the 400th anniversary of European presence in Ontario this year. In the town of Penetanguishene, we're having a huge event. It will probably be the signature event in Ontario for the celebration of 400 years since Champlain came here. I think the first mass west of Lower Canada was in Toaniché on August 12, 1615, and there were natives and Franco-Ontarians, Francos, at that particular event. We're celebrating that in a big way this year. They are, of course, our first European settlers to come to Canada, other than our First Nation brothers and sisters.

I don't want to spend a lot of time on that, but I know there has been a lot of effort put on the Franco-Ontarian—I do thank Minister Meilleur. I've been working with her for four or five years on this, and she has been very supportive of the 400th anniversary of Champlain. We hope other communities will celebrate it as well. Even here on September 25, you have Franco-Ontarian Day, and there will be celebrations around that time. I think there are some real opportunities for the

government and all of us to capitalize on this anniversary.

That takes me a little bit more into my final couple of comments, one being that the students who come from around the world to our universities and colleges—and I've said it a number of times, but I was just amazed when I toured Collège Boréal at 1 Yonge Street. It's right down on the water by Captain John's fish and chips place, that big boat that's down there. Collège Boréal has about 250 students there.

Most of the students are international. Most of the students who are there in Collège Boréal are francophone students, francophiles from somewhere in the world. Many of them are coloured people, many from different African countries. They all have French as their prime language, and they do take English courses there as well.

But there are some real opportunities for the government, and for all of us, capitalizing on some of these different individuals that come here. A lot of them will be going back home with the diplomas that are required but what I'm hearing from the administration there is that they could use more programming. I think that if we could pass anything on to the ministry or to the government—and particularly in Franco-Ontarian colleges, I think there are some real opportunities for more training.

That training can be used to help other countries in mining, for example. Boréal does a lot in mining in northern Ontario. There are some opportunities, because they're teaching people the mining industry, and they go back and create jobs in their country—in Sierra Leone or some of the French-speaking countries in Africa. It's just amazing how small the world really is.

That mining then turns into job creation for people who are creating mining products here in Canada, or wherever it may be in the world. It's really working out positively.

I think we should capitalize on some of our ethnic groups that are coming here just for an education, as international students, and yet they're taking back valuable information to help develop other countries, and we can capitalize on the sale of products to those other countries as well. That's one of the things I wanted to say as well.

Finally, my last comment is on our First Nation brothers and sisters. The system we've got today is not working. We know that. I mean, it's about jobs. Putting people on reserves 200 years ago, or whenever we did, whenever all that was created, I don't think has worked well enough.

We heard somebody speak earlier about the Ring of Fire. That's the kind of thing that works: getting those young men and women jobs, and not saying, "There's a cheque here waiting for you." I don't like what we've done there. I think we could have done a lot better job. I think there's a whole pile of people to blame.

As we build support for our immigration and for all the wonderful people who have come from all over the world, I think we still have left our First Nation brothers and sisters in a bad way. If the bill is really complete, and

if it's really supportive of all Ontarians and all Canadians, we've got to do a better job in working with our brothers and sisters from the First Nation reserves and places where they live. I know many of them are in deep poverty.

I can tell you, from my own example in Simcoe North, we've got Casino Rama, which is the Chippewas of Rama. Most of the people who live in Rama, the First Nation people, have jobs, and they've got cars and nice houses.

I go to the other end of my riding, out onto Christian Island, with the Beausoleil First Nation, where they have to go by a ferry to get there, year-round, or an ice trail or an ice road in the winter. They don't have the same kinds of job opportunities. Young people—there are suicides; there's that sort of thing.

We're not really complete until we look after our very first immigrants, which are our First Nation brothers and sisters.

Anyhow, those are my comments on this. Of course we're supporting it, and we're looking forward to the amendments.

I'm looking forward to the comments. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words today, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's always a pleasure to follow the passion of the member from Simcoe North that he brings to each and every debate in this House.

I'll touch on one aspect of what he was talking about, and that's the international students. A few years ago, I was on the board of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. I was at a conference, and my good Conservative friend Michael Thompson, a city councillor from Toronto, was talking about the benefits of foreign students to the city of Toronto. He said—and it blew me away—that when you add up the economic benefit of what the foreign students bring to the city of Toronto, it's in the billions of dollars a year. It's not in the millions, Speaker; it's in the billions. When you think of how many there are, and the tuition they pay, the rent they pay, the food they eat, the clothes they buy, the entertainment and the transportation, it adds up to billions of dollars a year. We don't credit, I believe, foreign students for doing that to our economy.

So when it comes to things such as simple solutions, as mentioned by the member from Parkdale—High Park earlier—OHIP coverage for foreign students—and as reiterated again by the member from Simcoe North, I think we have to do better all the way around.

1720

We have a medical school in Windsor. They keep telling us that the more residents you get, the higher the percentage is who will stay within the community that they do their studies in. If you have out-of-town students studying in your community, a good percentage of them will decide to stay, and these become creative, educated professionals who add so much to all of this, to our cultural fabric. We all share with each other.

The more we can do on the little things that matter—the more we can do to extend OHIP coverage or whatever it is—the more we should be doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My colleague from Simcoe North is correct: We have wonderful immigrant families living and working in our areas. More and more immigrant families have moved into my riding of Barrie, and I see them in the classrooms in the schools where I teach.

Their children are progressing well in our schools. These students are well received by other children. They're loved by other children. When you're exposed to other cultures that early in your life, you come to value them as friends and almost as family.

Their parents are so thankful that their children can go to good schools and make a life for themselves in Canada. These families worked very hard. Many of them were professionals in their former countries and now they have had to work on developing other skills and developing new lives with new jobs. Quite often, some of them open their own businesses, and these businesses become very successful.

These immigrants are a wonderful addition to our province and to our country. We need to encourage more of these immigrants to come to Canada and contribute to the economic future of Ontario and to Canada, and we need to accept the wonderful, diverse cultures that have been introduced in Canada.

My mother was raised in Edgar, which is in the Simcoe North riding. When she was a young woman, that was a place where people from the Underground Railroad came and settled. She went to school with the black children who lived there. When she got older and moved into town, she could not understand why other people were not accepting of the people that she'd been brought up with. She did not understand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Toby Barrett: That was a very good talk from our member from Simcoe North. I know he really appreciated the opportunity to speak, and we appreciate that note that was read in by Michael Gravelle. There's nothing worse than working on a speech all weekend and you stand up to give it and you're shut down.

The member for Simcoe North, if I can quote him, indicated that we are all immigrants, regardless of year of arrival. The Barretts came over on the Bolivar, from southern Ireland. My middle name is Butler—Butler's Rangers. We got kicked out of the Mohawk Valley at exactly the same time the Six Nations did. We fought side by side and ended up in the Niagara area. As with many of the Six Nations, we weren't at the time that interested in cutting down all those trees and farming, so you move on and do something else. I know that on my mum's side we still have the farm—my mum's farm. It was established in 1796. The Culvers and Bowlbys came up by sleighs—came up in 13 sleighs, actually—from

New Jersey. They came up through the woods and brought the slaves with them. Slavery was legal at that time on both sides of that border. We still have one of the sleighs from 1796 and, of course, the family Bible. Much of this, whether it's on my mum's side or on my father's side with the diaries and journals, the immigrant experience, even going back well over 200 years, is still very, very alive in our minds. It's either an Irish thing or a United Empire Loyalist thing.

I appreciate the opportunity to get the two minutes in, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's a privilege to stand on behalf of the people I represent in London West to respond to the comments from the member for Simcoe North. The member for Simcoe North focused much of his speech on international students. Given his critic portfolio, his interest in post-secondary education makes a lot of sense.

I think all of our communities have post-secondary institutions. I know in London we have Western and Fanshawe College, which are putting a lot of resources, effort and attention into international student recruitment efforts, because we recognize that bringing more students from other countries into our own communities benefits us hugely, whether they stay or not; but it also enables us to provide international experiences for our own students when we create these relationships with countries around the world. We are all made richer when we have a better understanding of people around the globe.

One of the things we've seen in London is that we are gaining as many immigrants as we are losing. There has been no net change in terms of new immigration into our community. A lot of the international students are staying, but many are not. One of the implications of drawing increasing numbers of immigrants from post-secondary student pools is that the role of the college and university becomes very much settlement service provider. I think that in light of these trends, in light of the fact that increasing numbers of provincial nominees are likely to be post-secondary students, we need to ensure that our post-secondary institutions are able to deliver the kind of settlement supports that students need.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. I return to the member for Simcoe North.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to thank the members from London West, Windsor-Tecumseh, Barrie and Haldimand-Norfolk for their comments.

Really, this is one of these bills where we all support it and we all make our comments on it. I just hope some of the comments we make, whether you're a government member, a member of the NDP or the PCs, are carefully listened to, because I think there are some good points being brought out.

The member from London West talks about international students and that as well. There are key issues there. You know what? Today, I think our colleges and

universities, because tuition has gone up—since this government took power, I believe tuition's up about 110%. Colleges have no more money, so they really count on international students.

But to give the international students decent health care—not every young man and woman is going to require health care when you're 18 and 20 years of age. But when someone does get sick, they need it, because they have to go back to the bank or they have to call home for more money, that type of thing—or they have no money at all and they have to drop out of school.

Those are the kinds of things that should be—if we're talking about supporting our immigrants and the things we can do, let's support some of the good ideas that we come up with in debate here. I'll be looking forward to that because I know the student associations were meeting with 20-something people here today. I hope they would listen to that.

Thank you for the opportunity again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's an honour to stand in this House to address this bill, Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act, 2014. I want to take a few moments, though, before I get into the body of my speech to recognize an immigrant who made a huge difference in this city and this country.

Mr. Neil Young, the member of Parliament for, first, Beaches–Woodbine and then Beaches–East York, was an extraordinary person. He died this past weekend. He represented an area with one of the largest South Asian populations in Ontario, centred on Crescent Town. He was a man who understood what it was like to come to a country, establish yourself, make a difference, build a family, and he represented that community in an extraordinary way. Neil and his surviving wife, Viv, made themselves a political force in the east end of Toronto, one that had broad respect right across this city. Neil will be missed, and I know this: His work will not be forgotten.

1730

Speaker, today we're talking about a bill that we hope will help future Neils and future Vivs in the work that they can do in this country. We in the New Democratic Party see this bill as small, see it as a step in the right direction nonetheless, but we need a bill that is going to do more on the “big picture” issues. My hope is that when this gets into committee, there will be the opportunity to actually strengthen the bill and make differences so that the people who come to this country, the people who establish new lives in this country, have the opportunity to fully utilize all their potential, all their skills, all their talents.

We know that Ontario is falling behind when it comes to the number of immigrants who arrive in Ontario. That is a huge problem, Speaker, because although I know that there are some who say having immigrants come into a country or a city takes away jobs from those who are

here, in fact, if you look at the history of Ontario, if you look at the history of the GTA, a large part of the wealth, a large part of the prosperity of this region and this province, has been rooted in that great wave of immigrants from around the world—from Africa, from Asia, from Europe, from Latin America—who have come and contributed their incredible energy to building an economy and a society that is second to none in the world.

If we are losing people, if we are losing attractiveness to newcomers, we are losing future prosperity. There's just no getting around it, Speaker. That is simply the reality. We need to be an attractive destination. We need to be a place that makes people from around the world say, “Yes, we want to come to Ontario.”

I think one of the members earlier was talking about a gentleman in Sudbury who had come from Lebanon. I had a good friend a number of years back who was from Bangladesh, an accountant who arrived in Ontario and went to Baffin Island to get work as an accountant.

People come here. They are incredibly ready to adapt to a new situation, to adopt a new lifestyle. What they need, though, are the supports from this province, from this society, so they can contribute to their full ability. This bill doesn't address many of the fundamental challenges facing newcomers, nor does it reflect the typical low-wage migrant experience.

Speaker, a few years ago I had the opportunity as the finance critic to work with people in the Sikh community in Brampton. This is a very dynamic community. People in Brampton from the Punjab, from an area that has been a big hub of economic growth on the Indian subcontinent, were finding that they couldn't get work, full-time or permanent work, with actual companies. They had to go through temp agencies time after time after time. They knew that the temp agencies were getting a very large hourly payment and that they, very capable workers that they were, were getting a low hourly wage.

Speaker, one of the things that we need to address, if we're going to make Ontario an attractive destination, if we're going to keep it an attractive destination, is this whole question of precarious part-time work. When I researched it, I found that in parts of northern Europe where governments had taken on this issue, what they ensured was that a part-time or temporary worker would get the same wages and benefits as the full-time permanent worker. It eliminated the incentive to use temp companies, to use those middle people who would take a big chunk of whatever was paid by the company and not pass it onto the person who actually worked on the shop floor, who worked on the construction site, who worked in the office doing administrative work.

Speaker, this government has been in power now for more than 10 years. It has had the opportunity for over a decade to address many of the concerns that my colleague from Parkdale–High Park had raised, that I have raised in previous speeches and that my colleague from

London West has raised. It has left this until very late in the day.

The member for Guelph, responding last week to the member from London West, said, "It's important to understand that Bill 49 isn't the be-all and end-all.... It's really the first step; it's the starting point." If you've been in power from 2003 to 2015—12 years—why wasn't the starting point a bit closer to the beginning of the mandate? I think that's a reasonable question to ask and a reasonable concern to have.

Last week, my colleague from London West addressed this bill in some detail. She's the critic for training, colleges and universities. I'd like to return to a number of the specific points that she made in her speech. She noted that we as a province have a lot to learn from others about best practices. Between 2001 and 2011, Ontario's proportion of immigrants declined from 60% to 40%, which is now Ontario's lowest share of new immigrants in 30 years. Particularly, Ontario's share of economic immigrants has significantly declined, to the point where economic immigrants make up only half of all immigrants to Ontario, lower than any other province.

That does not bode well for the future of Ontario. We're losing the talent we're going to need to build our cities and to develop our rural areas. We're losing the talent that could make a difference in every city, town and region of this province.

Now, it was interesting to me that the member for London West referred to London as "a preferred secondary destination for immigrants after they have arrived in Toronto...." I have to say, my parents were immigrants. They arrived in Toronto and almost immediately left town to go to London, which is how I came to be born in London, Ontario.

Interjections.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I know, surprising news for some of my colleagues. I'm a politician; I can claim a base in just about every town in this province.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That makes you a rural member.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: No, London is not a rural riding.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: At the time.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: No, at the time London was still a well-developed town.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Were you in the city or outside?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: In the city.

I think that she raised a very good point: We have a variety of environments where people can come and land in this province. Toronto is one environment; it's my city. London is a great city. Windsor is a great city. There are a lot of places—

Mr. Bill Walker: Owen Sound.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Owen Sound—that offer a lot of different opportunities for newcomers to this province. In order for each of those places, each city, large, medium-sized or small, to fully take advantage of those new Canadians, we need to have legislation that gives them the support.

Last fall, London's Vital Signs report was released. It showed that the rate of unemployment among recent immigrants to London—those who arrived within the last five years—was almost 20% in 2011 compared to 8.5% for non-immigrants. I think the member for London West pointed out, and she was right, that it's a huge, huge waste of human potential and undermining of our economy when these people, our people, our new fellow citizens, don't have the opportunity to actually go out there, earn a living and build their lives.

I see I'm running out of time. I'll have an opportunity in response to question and comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I'm pleased to speak on Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act, but I'll have to say it pains me to bring a number of points to light in this House. We certainly congratulate the Prime Minister of Canada for attempting to execute a photo op granting honorary Canadian citizenship to Malala Yousafzai, but as you'll recall, that was probably more of a photo opportunity because legitimate applications are essentially being ignored.

In response to my honourable opponent opposite, I would respectfully suggest that we have currently a Prime Minister and a government more focused on being the Prime Minister of Alberta, regarding the preferential treatment of Alberta, particularly in this domain, with regard to refugee and immigration settlement and integration of newcomers.

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As an example, they have removed the list of doctors who speak Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, Farsi, Arabic and Gujarati. Why have the doctors who are speaking those languages hang around if you're not going to have any refugees from those countries?

Speaker, I don't need to go too broadly over the recent elegant comments emanating from the federal side on the colour scheme of the temporary foreign worker issue, but they're institutionalizing a second-tier, second-class group of immigrants—yes, catering to particular interests.

By the way, again, don't get sick while you're here because we certainly don't want to pay for the refugee or the immigrant newcomer care. It's a tragedy. It is the slow and steady Americanization—even, I would say, Wisconsinization—of the province of Ontario.

Frankly speaking, Speaker, whatever photo ops you want to come to, whether it's in my riding, Prime Minister Harper, which you executed about a month ago—shame.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before we continue with questions and comments, I think it's important to point out that the questions and comments are supposed to relate back to the member's remarks—the person who had the floor and gave the speech. The member for Etobicoke North, I think, understands that.

Questions and comments.

Mr. Bill Walker: Interesting: A number of the other Liberals talked about how much they want to work with the federal government, how this was going to be a co-operative thing. That seemed to be a bit bellicose, Mr. Speaker. I think that was a word used earlier today.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes. Obstreperous.

Mr. Bill Walker: Obstreperous, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to go back to my colleague from Toronto—Danforth. He made a good comment: the lowest share of immigrants in 30 years. Could that be because of the state of our economy, the state or shape of our province currently, compared to where we could be?

One of the other colleagues from the Liberals talked earlier today about how much they have done and how wonderful things are. You know what? We're still relatively good compared to a lot of other places in the world, but just think of how much better we could be if we truly brought in the talent and had an economy. The key tenet of all of that is having the opportunity for jobs in our great province. More jobs than anyone else would be the way that we would attract more immigrants—being able to give them the hope and the opportunity to come to Ontario and drive this province forward like we have for so long.

I'm very proud to put on record my English and my Irish heritage. My family has long, long roots, and I'm proud. I think every immigrant population that has come to this country brings their own culture, their diversity, their wonderful traditions, their habits, their food, their skills, their experience. That's what we need to embrace because that is, as I've said earlier in my comments, the cultural mosaic that is Canada, that is Ontario.

I think we need to do all we can to get this province back to the point where everyone outside of Canada wants it to become their home. The pride that people bring to this great province and the pride that they have in bringing their families here and making it their home are what we all should be striving for.

We need a firing economy. We need to have job creation. We need to lower the debt levels to ensure that those immigrants have the opportunity to come here in the future and have the type of lifestyle we all deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments with respect to the speech that was just given by the member for Toronto—Danforth? I recognize the member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Why are you warning me before I speak? That must mean something.

I wanted to actually speak to the point that the member made, which is the bill everybody supports. But it is a small step.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you; I'm glad I got your approval for this.

Speaker, that's really what I wanted to raise: that I don't think there's anybody in this House who doesn't agree with what the government is doing.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: On this issue.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think most of us who have been around for a while understand that Ontario needs—yes, on this issue. Thank you for qualifying that. There are a lot of issues we disagree on.

We all agree that Ontario has to play a larger role when it comes to the policies of immigration in our province because, clearly, our interests need to be protected, and who better able to protect those interests and to do what's right for Ontario than the Ontario government?

The problem, however, is that this bill doesn't do that. It's a first step, an all-important first step, one that we're all going to support. But when it comes down to the nuts and bolts of what this bill does, it doesn't deal with the kind of things that we have to deal with.

I'll just use one example. I come from northeastern Ontario—predominantly francophone. Why is it, as a federal government, and why is it that we're not going to really be able, under this bill, as a provincial government, to actually have a strategy in place that says when there are francophone immigrants from across the world who want to come to Canada and establish themselves in Ontario, that northeastern Ontario be actually indicated as a place they can go?

You know what? There are jobs there. There is good social infrastructure. There's great infrastructure when it comes to health and others that we've put in place. Guess what? You can actually live in French in northeastern Ontario and never have to speak English again. People don't recognize that. There are communities in our riding, as yours, as mine, where after four generations, the first language is still French and pretty bad English. Now, I'm not saying that's a good thing, but my point is—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, I'm saying that's a good thing. I'm just thinking we need to be able to deal with trying to find ways to increase immigration of francophones in northeastern Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment with respect to the remarks given by the member for Toronto—Danforth.

I recognize the member for Windsor—

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Davenport.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Davenport. I apologize.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you, Speaker. It gives me great pleasure, as an immigrant to this great country myself, having come here to Toronto in 1970 with my family, as a young child—

Applause.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: That's right. I'm almost giving away my age there.

It gives me great honour to speak on this bill once again, especially representing a riding such as Davenport, that is so diverse and is perhaps one of the most diverse ridings that we have here in the province.

I'm very proud that, if this bill passes, Ontario will become the second province after Quebec to introduce its

immigration legislation. Our proposed legislation is only a beginning; it is not the end. There still will be work to be done, but we are on track.

This act will formally recognize the long history of immigration in Ontario and the important nation-building role it has played in forming Ontario's social, economic and cultural values. With this legislation, we are taking steps towards charting our own course when it comes to attracting more skilled immigrants to drive our economy and keep Ontario strong.

I am so impressed when I go into my riding of Davenport and meet immigrant upon immigrant who has come to this country, come to this province, to call it home and has worked very hard to establish themselves—and may I add that they are successful in the businesses that they are now running.

Equally important, the act will contribute to good governance by making sure that authority for Ontario's selection programs is clear and transparent. We all know of those unscrupulous immigration consultants and lawyers that take advantage of the vulnerable immigrants that come here to call Ontario home, and we need to put a stop to that.

If passed, the act will strengthen our ongoing efforts to deter fraud and detect misrepresentation. The Ontario Immigration Act will increase transparency and information-sharing with our immigrant partners.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important bill. I'm glad I was able to speak on it here today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Toronto—Danforth has two minutes to respond.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I want to thank the members from Etobicoke North, Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, Timmins—James Bay and Davenport for their comments. Generally speaking, they were in the general region of immigration in this bill, so I appreciate that focus.

Speaker, the comments from the member from Timmins—James Bay: I think what he has to say makes a lot of sense. I think it makes good sense for Ontario to reinforce the reality of our francophone community, to show people the advantages to northeastern Ontario, those who are francophone or native French speakers who want to live in that environment.

But I also want to say that the shift in immigration in the Toronto area has meant that, increasingly, Toronto has become a centre for francophone citizens. I was talking to the head of one of the francophone teachers' federations, who had said that Toronto is on track to have a larger francophone population than Ottawa. For us, we find that really a big plus. I know that francophone parents in Toronto want more francophone services, particularly education—schools—so that they can send their children to be schooled in French from daycare, from la garderie, up to the end of secondary school. I think it makes sense for us, again, to take advantage of that population and make sure that they have the services so that they can live their lives fully and utilize their talents fully in the language they were born to.

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Speaker, my hope is that when this bill goes to committee, there will be addressing of those questions that we've raised in these debates to improve the bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to share my time this evening with the member from Cambridge and the outstanding member from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

I'm pleased to stand here to speak about Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act. If passed, this bill will help to recognize the important role that immigration and immigrants play in our province of Ontario, and Canada as a whole, of course. People from around the world choose to make Ontario their new home because of the bounty we have to offer: multiculturalism, community and, of course, opportunity.

Obviously, I'm proud to say that the Conference Board, CIBC, Bank of Montreal and RBC have all said that Ontario will lead the country this year in economic growth.

Closer to home, an investment by Ford Motor Co., right next to my riding, in Oakville, where members of my riding will work and already do: \$400 million. I think that speaks to the economic vibrancy of our province.

Anything that we can help to do to make the process easier to navigate and understand for our immigrants will go a long way to ensuring that they feel welcome and integrate more seamlessly into their new communities.

Stats Canada believes that by 2017, immigrants will make up 22.2% of our population. A combination of factors, including our low birth rate and our aging population—certainly the case in Burlington—means that going forward, Canada and Ontario will rely more heavily on immigration to help grow our economy.

In fact, in my region of Halton, like many urban centres in Ontario, we've seen a significant and steady increase in immigration in the past 15 years. Between the years of 2000 and 2009, the number of immigrants has risen an astounding 140%. These individuals and their families help contribute to the local economy, open businesses and create jobs, and they contribute to the sense of culture and community.

But simply having people come and live in Ontario is not enough, Mr. Speaker. This bill will help to create the necessary tools for our province to attract the kind of skilled immigrants we need to meet future labour demands.

Aligning our immigration policy with our economic policy is not the only reason for this type of legislation. Many new immigrants come to Canada to improve their lives and that of their families but can occasionally be taken advantage of right from the start, and that's something we should all be concerned about. As a result of this, individuals representing themselves as so-called immigration specialists can confuse them with lengthy documents and confusing language, often charging them

large amounts of money for their services. Once the transaction is complete, these people disappear and those who sought their help are left with nothing. This bill will help to strengthen and clarify the terms surrounding representation within the system and protect immigrants from this kind of fraud and abuse. This will ensure that only those authorized may act as representatives of those seeking to immigrate and will create penalties for those seeking to defraud would-be Canadians.

This legislation is an important first step for the province of Ontario in increasing our role in immigration policies. By working to enhance our relationship on this issue with our federal counterparts and sharing this great responsibility, we can help those who wish to be part of our great province do so and, in turn, help grow our economy and our communities.

In closing, immigrants are going to be instrumental in the shaping of Ontario's future economically, culturally and otherwise, and so it is our job to make sure it's done right.

In summary, helping immigrants is all of our collective responsibilities. Showing them the red carpet, not red tape, is what Bill 49 is all about, and I urge every member of this House to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Cambridge.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I'm really pleased to join the debate today on Bill 49, a bill to establish the Ontario Immigration Act, on behalf of many of my constituents in Cambridge, many of whom are immigrants or whose parents or grandparents immigrated in the early days when Cambridge was being formed.

As we well know, immigration is a driving force in this province. It builds our economy, enriches our society and helps us to compete on the world stage. Immigrants have made deep and enduring contributions that have shaped the quality of life we enjoy today across this province. At every stage of Ontario's history, newcomers offered skills, knowledge, optimism and hard work that advanced our economy.

This is certainly true in my community in Cambridge. The original towns of Cambridge that make up today's Cambridge were Galt, Preston, Hespeler and Blair. They were founded on the Speed and Grand rivers, which provided power for the many textile mills.

Early in the 20th century, Portuguese textile workers were some of the best in the world. Many Portuguese immigrants came to these thriving mills that contributed so much to the very early economic development of Cambridge and really provided the foundation for the economic success of Cambridge today.

These immigrants sponsored their families to come over. In the mid-1980s, when I arrived in Cambridge, almost one third of Cambridge residents actually spoke fluent Portuguese. They were certainly able to contribute to the rich fabric of our society in Cambridge today.

As Ontario faces more global competition, we're counting on newcomers today more than ever before. The

Ontario Immigration Act would position Ontario for success in this global economic environment.

As we all know, talent is the most sought-after commodity in today's economy. Entrepreneurial spirit, cultural knowledge, and creative thinking make economies more innovative and creative. Ontario's newcomers bring with them links to international markets, which in turn create more opportunities to build strategic partnerships across the world.

Newcomers bring innovative ideas and unique perspectives. They make valuable contributions to emerging industries like information technology, engineering and bioscience.

In the global economy, Ontario's cultural diversity gives us a clear edge. That's really what our government's Going Global Trade Strategy is all about. Our effort to tap into new markets is greatly enhanced by people who speak very different languages, have international networks, and understand different business cultures.

Of course, it's more than trade. We continue to rely on newcomers to maintain our labour force. With an aging population, low birth rates, and retiring baby boomers, we are counting on skilled immigrants to continue helping to meet our future labour needs.

Speaker, I'm so pleased to hear so much support for this bill across the House, and I really look forward to its passing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell.

Mr. Grant Crack: It is good news to hear support for this bill on all sides of the House.

I recall, in the campaign of 2011, the change in attitude from the members of the official opposition, when, in fact, new Ontarians were being called "foreign workers." So I just want to tell you that I really appreciate—and I'm sure that all new Ontarians appreciate—the fact that there has been a little bit of a change over there. I'm not quite sure what the reason is.

However, we had a lot of discussion about francophones and francophone immigration in this province. It seems that all members who have spoken today are wanting the francophones to come to their communities. But I can tell you that in my community of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, which is over 65% francophone, providing the services to new francophone Ontarians is very critical. We do have all the services available for our francophone community. That's why, in our immigration strategy that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has put forward, we have a target of 5% of all newcomers to Ontario—we're hoping they're going to be French-speaking, because we know the economic benefit of that. We are a bilingual country; there are two official languages.

I have a minute and 40 seconds left.

I want to congratulate and thank the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Honourable Jeff Leal, for his commitment in ensuring that the collège d'Alfred, in my riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell,

continues to provide services and educational programming in my riding.

It was great news when he announced last Thursday, along with the minister responsible for francophone affairs, the Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, the Honourable Reza Moridi, that La Cité collégiale is going to assume the lead of this important agricultural francophone college in my riding. So I want to thank you, Minister, for that commitment that you've made in ensuring that we can continue.

I am so excited about the opportunity. The president of La Cité collégiale, Lise Bourgeois—

Hon. Jeff Leal: I had the chance to meet her. Lovely lady.

Mr. Grant Crack: She did. She came, and we had a great meeting. She's excited about the opportunity.

We're going to look at expanding programs at le collège d'Alfred. We're going to be looking at forestry.

We all know that the Premier has set targets for growing the agri-food sector. We're going to be creating new jobs. Technology is changing; farming communities are using different techniques now.

I can tell you, Speaker, that that excitement coming out of le collège d'Alfred and out of Prescott-Russell and the united counties, and all the local mayors and councillors—we're so excited. We're going to continue to grow, and we need more new Ontarians.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1800.

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		Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
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Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB)	Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord	
Rinaldi, Lou (LIB)	Northumberland–Quinte West	
Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Guelph	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Sattler, Peggy (NDP)	London West / London-Ouest	
Scott, Laurie (PC)	Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brook	
Sergio, Hon. / L'hon. Mario (LIB)	York West / York-Ouest	Minister Responsible for Seniors Affairs Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille
Singh, Jagmeet (NDP)	Bramalea–Gore–Malton	
Smith, Todd (PC)	Prince Edward–Hastings	
Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Tabuns, Peter (NDP)	Toronto–Danforth	
Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB)	Mississauga–Erindale	
Taylor, Monique (NDP)	Hamilton Mountain	
Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiane (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound	
Wilson, Jim (PC)	Simcoe–Grey	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle
Wong, Soo (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt	
Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
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Yurek, Jeff (PC)	Elgin–Middlesex–London	
Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Willowdale	Minister of Aboriginal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires autochtones

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First Session, 41st Parliament

Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

Première session, 41^e législature



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Tuesday 10 March 2015

Mardi 10 mars 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 10 March 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 10 mars 2015

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

AGRICULTURE INSURANCE ACT (AMENDING THE CROP INSURANCE ACT, 1996), 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ASSURANCE AGRICOLE (MODIFIANT LA LOI DE 1996 SUR L'ASSURANCE-RÉCOLTE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 5, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 40, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur l'assurance-récolte (Ontario) et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When we last discussed this bill, the member from Kitchener–Conestoga had just finished his speech. It's now time for questions and comments.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm hoping very much that my phone doesn't ring. I'm pleased to add my two minutes to this. Basically what I want to talk about is that although I live in northern Ontario and we're covered in snow right now, there is a viable agricultural economy in Nickel Belt and northeastern Ontario. Much of that agricultural economy was based on the fact that we had horses, that we had a racetrack and that all of the hay that grew had been specialized to make sure that we feed those racehorses. With the cancellations of the racetracks through the Slots at Racetracks Program, all of those farmers are hurting.

There is no insurance for those farmers now. Nickel Belt will continue to grow hay, but there's nobody to eat it. That's a real blow to agriculture in my riding, and this is a real blow to the agriculture economy because, you see, if you're a farmer who grows hay to feed the horses at the racetrack, you have the money to buy a tractor, to buy a trailer, to fix your barn, and that allows you to have other crops. We're starting to grow soy and other grains in Nickel Belt and doing well with it. But when you lose your main crop, when you lose the horses that eat the hay that grows all over Nickel Belt, then it is a real step back

for all of those farmers. Some of them are not going to make it and are not making it. There is no insurance for that. This is the doing of the government that cancelled the slots at racetracks, and they would need insurance from their government. Thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It's a pleasure to follow my colleague from Nickel Belt. You know, this is a bill that I think in the end all three parties are going to support. So let's just cover some of the things that the bill does.

In 2013, which is the last year for which we have reliable statistics, there were more than 14,000 insurance customers representing five million acres and nearly \$3 billion in liabilities that were insured under the production insurance program. Now, this program covers more than 90 commercially grown crops. For many of the folks where I come from, these are the things that you customarily buy at the grocery store. So one of the things that we often tell a lot of our rural folks is that, as we would find that happy medium in getting rural people to grasp urban issues and urban people to grasp rural issues, sometimes we have to explain that often in the cities—in order to overcome that disconnect—people think farm products come from the grocery store. We have to explain to them the other part, which leads back to the farm.

Here are some of the things that production insurance also covers. It covers grains and oilseeds, tree fruits and grapes, processing vegetables, fresh market vegetables, specialty crops and forage. A lot of these terms are ones that our rural cousins are far more familiar with than we are in the city.

Some of the reasons that this bill is so important is because production insurance costs so much less when we do it as a province than it does when we do it on an ad hoc basis. That's part of the reason that we need to get this bill enacted very quickly. So, for example, ad hoc costs would include the full cost of payments in a bad year, and the bad year is governed by weather.

Speaker, thanks for the opportunity to stand up and to comment on something that's important to those of us in the city as well as to those of us in rural areas.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to provide a couple of minutes of comments to the member for Kitchener–Conestoga on Bill 40.

I just want to note that I've got 17 members of our caucus—

Interjection: I'm one of them.

Mr. Steve Clark:—who have yet to speak to this bill. In fact, I have four members here this morning who are excited and enthused about speaking to this bill.

Interjection: Chomping at the bit.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm so glad the member for Glenora—Prescott—Russell is here, and I hope at some point maybe he can clarify his comments. He was almost gloating yesterday that he has received money for a new cohort of students at Alfred and I haven't received funds for a new cohort of students at Kemptville College. I think both facilities—and I've never been on the Alfred campus, but I firmly believe that Ontario needs agriculture education both at Alfred and Kemptville. I think they're both very wonderful campuses.

As I have quoted many times in the Legislature, there's a report that the University of Guelph and OAC have tabled that has essentially said that, given present demand, we still have a 3-to-1 gap between graduates at the diploma and the degree level and available jobs. So if the government is really committed to providing 120,000 new agriculture jobs, we've got to have educational opportunities in this province. I know this government is reluctant to do it, but they need to make a commitment to not just one of those campuses—and I see the minister of francophone affairs is here; she has committed funds to one campus. We have to commit to both campuses. We have to treat both facilities, at Kemptville and at Alfred, the same. We've got to make that commitment. If we're going to meet the agri-food challenge, if we're going to meet that job challenge, we have to do it. We're committed to it on this side of the House. We're also committed to speaking on Bill 40. I've got four members here. I'm asking the government to let us debate this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I thank the third party for letting me stand up and speak to this. I wanted to follow up the remarks of, particularly, the member for Nickel Belt, but obviously my other colleagues, and I do hope that all three parties support this.

The points that were made earlier by the member for Nickel Belt certainly motivate me to stand up and speak about the fact that agriculture and farming and farm innovation is such a huge part of the northern Ontario economy. It has been very much identified in the northern Ontario growth plan as one of the priority areas, agriculture—and aquaculture, may I say, as well.

We are particularly pleased that through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corp. we've been able to focus on ways that we can work with the farming alliances in northern Ontario.

A couple of months ago, I was up in New Liskeard at a Northern Ontario Heritage Fund board meeting and was able to announce significant support—funding, resources—through the Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance for funds to help there with the tile drainage, which makes an enormous difference in the farming sector. It doubles the yields, quite frankly, on the ground, and that's huge. There's more funding coming to north-

western Ontario as well, but this is a good example of how we view it as an absolute priority.

0910

May I say again, it's a small, little-known fact, but the executive director of the Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance is the daughter of the MPP for Timiskaming—Cochrane. She does a marvelous job.

We are going to continue to support those kinds of innovations and continue to make agriculture a huge part of the economy, certainly all across the province, but very much an important one in northern Ontario. Of course, part of that would be supporting this piece of legislation that is before us today. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker, and good morning. You know what? I'd like to thank the folks who chimed in on the debate for Bill 40: of course the member from Mississauga—Streetsville; my colleague to the left, from Nickel Belt; the wise House leader on this side, the member from Leeds—Grenville; and, of course, the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. Thank you for that.

When I last left off, I was talking about transparency and really questioning the fairness and openness of the grant processes that were put in place. It's just something that we don't want to see happen again. We need to make sure this is in place. You heard in the comments just recently the disappointment that we've heard in the government closing Kemptville and Alfred agricultural colleges. These colleges are an important part of developing our future farmers.

I know, from my experience coming from a rural community, not too many of my friends were able to stay on the family farm. Many of them would have loved to but, you know, farmers are aging, and we need to encourage more young people to get into the business.

I have to mention the 100th anniversary recently of 4-H Canada, something that I participated in when I was a young lad and that I hope my children will also participate in, as they may, too, want to look at a career in agriculture. These colleges are an integral part of developing our young people so that they are the future farmers of tomorrow, including even Alfred College, in fact the only French-language agricultural diploma program in the province. Closing it will prevent many francophone students from training for careers in agriculture.

With that, I appreciate the time given to speak on Bill 40. I know many of my colleagues who are here today also want to speak to Bill 40. I look forward to listening to them on those remarks.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to add a few minutes to the debate on Bill 40. You see, I represent a riding in northeastern Ontario, and a lot of people don't equate Nickel Belt with agriculture. When they think about Nickel Belt, they think about nickel and they think

about the mines. Yes, absolutely, all of the nickel mines are in my riding and Nickel Belt will continue to do good in mining, but we also have some beautiful, beautiful agricultural land in areas of my riding called Rayside-Balfour, called the valley. We have some multi-generational farmers who are there in beautiful agricultural land.

The first thing I want to talk about is basically what happened when the Slots at Racetracks Program was cancelled. That came as a surprise in the middle of the winter. It was March. The then-Minister of Finance stood up and said that this program was going to be cancelled. For farmers whose farms are under four feet of snow, to be told that next year's crop is not going to have a buyer—it's not a good time to hear that kind of stuff. Is there insurance out there for government policies gone awry? Because the farmers in Nickel Belt would like to have this kind of insurance when their government makes decisions like this.

Last year, for the first time in decades, we did not have horse racing at Sudbury Downs. Sudbury Downs stands closed. It was the only racetrack throughout Ontario that was never able to put a deal together. Although the government had put deals in place with every racetrack in southern Ontario, the one and only racetrack in the north never had a deal.

I worked with the Minister of Agriculture, and I thank him for working with me. He gave us the services of Mr. Walling. Mr. Walling was a consultant who helped Peterborough's Kawartha Downs put a deal together. Kawartha Downs looks very much like Sudbury Downs; it is privately owned—Sudbury Downs is privately owned by the MacIsaac family—and so is Kawartha. They were able to put together an agricultural society. The agricultural society is well on its way to being formed in Nickel Belt also. It would be the not-for-profit society that would hold the licence that would run the races at Sudbury Downs. The MacIsaac family would continue to hold on to and own Sudbury Downs, but they would enter into a rental agreement with the agricultural society so that we could continue to have racing, with its so-important role that it has on agriculture.

As I have said before, it's hard to understand why every other track in Ontario was able to conclude a deal while Sudbury Downs, the only track in northern Ontario, sits idle. I know that it is tied into the OLG and the new gaming framework. This part is proving so, so difficult for us. We have an owner who is willing to enter into a rental agreement; we have a not-for-profit agency that is willing to hold the licence and do the racing. We certainly have shown, through the good work of Mr. Walling, through the support of the Minister of Agriculture, that there is a future for horse racing in northern Ontario. There are people who are excited about owning horses and racing them and training them, with all of the spinoff jobs that go directly into agriculture—because racing horses basically depends on there being the right kind of hay and the right kind of products for them to perform. This deal is so close to being there.

The Minister of Northern Development and Mines just talked about the northern Ontario farm alliance, as well as the possibility of his ministry helping put together a strong and robust agricultural society so that we see success and we can rebuild horse racing. The sticking point is really the agreement with the OLG. For people to invest in owning horses, there needs to be more than a one-year deal. Right now, the slots at the Sudbury Downs are on a month-to-month: They never know from one month to the next if they will continue to have slots at the Sudbury Downs. This doesn't work for us. They need at least a four-year agreement so that it makes it worthwhile for people to make those purchases and to make sure that we invest back into our agricultural sector in Nickel Belt, to make it strong and robust like it was before. I ask the government to do the right thing, to look at the devastating impact they have had on the farmers and agriculture in Nickel Belt, and bring back horse racing.

Everything that could be done on the ground has been done. The players are willing to move on with this new model, where a not-for-profit agricultural society would hold the licence, would do the racing, but we need this deal from OLG. OLG is not easy to deal with. They certainly don't see us as a big market. Nickel Belt will never be a big market, but that doesn't mean that we should be ignored; that doesn't mean that it is okay that for the last two months they have not connected back with us.

0920

We need them at the table. Horse racing being part of gaming, the OLG has to be willing to give a four-year agreement for the slots at Sudbury Downs so that we know there is a future and we know that we can bring the horses back and the racing back, to the delight of everybody. It used to be a family event where people would go to the racetrack to celebrate. I remember celebrating my in-laws' anniversary—I think it was their 68th—where the whole family went to the racetrack. We went to the dining room and basically had a beautiful meal together as a family and bet on the races. Kids always like to see horses. They are a beautiful animal. Everybody likes to see the horses. But right now they're gone, and our community wants them to come back.

J'aimerais profiter de l'occasion également pour rappeler que pour la communauté franco-ontarienne, le collège d'Alfred est ce qui a permis à l'agriculture de continuer à profiter dans tout l'Ontario. Le collège d'Alfred, c'est là où on a formé—tu regardes la jeune génération de fermiers, d'agriculteurs et d'agricultrices dans mon comté; ils ont tous été formés au collège d'Alfred. On nous a donné un rapport dans lequel on met une structure corporative au collège d'Alfred, ce qui n'a pas beaucoup de bon sens. Moi, des structures corporatives compliquées, avec Ornge, je vous garantis que j'en ai vues plusieurs. Bien, si tu regardes ce qui se passe à Alfred, c'est vraiment difficile. Le collège d'Alfred, ce sont des racines profondes dans l'agriculture de partout en Ontario, et ça aussi a besoin de continuer.

Je remercie le ministre de l'Agriculture pour nous avoir soutenus au travers de M. Walling pour ramener

l'hippodrome à Sudbury Downs pour permettre de recommencer les courses de chevaux dans le nord de l'Ontario, dans mon comté de Nickel Belt. On a une société agricole qui a été mise en place. On a un partenariat entre le propriétaire de l'hippodrome et la société d'agriculture. Ce qui nous manque, c'est vraiment qu'OLG vienne à la table pour donner un contrat d'au moins quatre ans pour que les machines à sous continuent à Sudbury Downs pour nous permettre de ramener les chevaux. Avec les chevaux, c'est l'agriculture dans Nickel Belt qui devient plus robuste et plus solide.

Je vous remercie, monsieur le Président, de m'avoir accordé ces quelques minutes. Je vois que mon temps est terminé. Merci.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments? The member from Beaches—East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker—the great agricultural riding of Beaches—East York.

I'm delighted to have an opportunity to rise and respond to the member from Nickel Belt's comments, particularly her comments related to the horse racing industry in Sudbury at Sudbury Downs. It would be delightful to have racing continuing up there, and I know those negotiations are continuing.

But more importantly, with the whole Slots at Race-tracks Program, we know we did the right thing in removing the slots—an unaccountable program. It lacked the transparency. It lost its focus on the customer experience in racing. So we're going down the right track. We've created some funding which will allow for the horse racing industry to become better and better and be built on a firm foundation.

But what we see very clearly in the debate that we're hearing on the other side of the House, when we're talking about horse racing, we're talking about education in agriculture, we're talking about Alfred College, we're talking about Kemptville College, is that we're talking nothing about this bill before us. This bill is about the Agriculture Insurance Act. So we're trying very hard to listen—listening and giving opportunities to members opposite. They can have input. But if they're not going to speak to the bill, understand that we've spoken to this bill now for over 11 hours—11 hours.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Mr. Arthur Potts: The best comments on this bill are coming in the heckling from the other side. It certainly isn't coming up during their reasoned discussion. Seventy-five members have already spoken to this bill. We've extended the debate past the mandatory six and a half. We're trying to be inclusive. But since the members are not speaking to the bill anymore, Mr. Speaker—and I appreciate you give them great latitude to talk about extraneous issues. But what we're trying to do is put other agricultural products into the insurance act to help farmers.

We have unanimous agreement on this bill going forward, and I think it's time to send it to committee. We want to hear from people about what they want to see

insured, whether it's bees or pork or fowl. That's what this bill is about. We look forward very much to having it in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join the debate for Bill 40 this morning. Unfortunately, what I have, under the rules of this House, is two minutes to address the speech of my colleague from Nickel Belt.

I'm reading between the lines of what's happening on the other side of the House, and it grieves me deeply. It appears to me that the government is once again going to display their arrogance and exercise their power and invoke closure on this bill. I have not had the opportunity—I would like the opportunity to speak about agriculture in my riding. I would like to speak about the fine people who support our economy, as farmers, in our ridings. But I'm not likely to have the opportunity. I hope that there's a change of heart and that the minister does not invoke closure, but I have a great fear that that's exactly what he plans to do very shortly.

Not only have I not spoken to this bill; I have 17 members of our caucus who have not spoken to this bill. The great agricultural heart of Ontario is represented by members of my caucus. Are we not going to have the opportunity to speak to this bill in a more wholesome way—a 10-minute rotation, and not simply a two-minute response to another member's speech?

I thank the member for Nickel Belt for informing us about how important agriculture is in northern Ontario, which is very often overlooked. The average person doesn't see that. I remember the first time I went to visit our son up at Halfway Lake Provincial Park. I remarked to my wife that I couldn't believe the amount of agriculture going on between North Bay and Sudbury, and Sturgeon Falls and all that area there. It was amazing to me, the amount of agriculture.

But I want to talk about agriculture in the great riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, and I hope that that House leader gives me the opportunity.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Further questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: This bill is very supportable, and it seems that we have a lot of support in the House. But one of the interesting parts of the bill is that Ontario is actually behind other provinces in extending insurance to agricultural products. This bill would allow including currently ineligible products, such as livestock.

I took it upon myself to make sure that I reached out to farmers. I went to the Ontario beef association's AGM recently—the beef farmers—and I sat at a table with members from the Renfrew riding, which the member from the PC caucus just talked about. They talked about the need for BSE insurance. That was a real devastation when that happened to livestock and farmers' livelihoods. So it's good to see that this bill will open up those doors and discussions to extend that coverage.

The member from Renfrew has talked about farming in his area. We often go out to Renfrew, because we have family there and we visit. He's absolutely correct: They have wonderful farmland out there. That's proven with the fact that the beef farmers that I spoke to—they have beef farmers out there. They have agricultural—growing all kinds of products like corn. It's a real thriving industry, and it needs support.

This is an important bill. They need to have that insurance expansion, and I think that putting this forward in the House is a good first step. But we also know that it needs to have some funding and regulations attached to it. It can't survive on its own without practical means to move it forward with some funding and regulations.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It gives me great pleasure this morning to speak in favour of Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act. It seems that everybody is in agreement about this bill, so it will be better if we send the bill to committee and pass Bill 40 as soon as possible. It would be good for the agricultural community.

0930

I know that the MPP from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please. Thank you.

I would remind you that, if there are going to be any comments that would in fact add to the debate, the members should at least be in their seat when those comments are being made. I thank everyone in the assembly for that.

Back to the Attorney General, to continue with your two-minute questions and comments.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I was talking about the good member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, who represents a very agricultural community, where le collège d'Alfred is. I know that the member from Nickel Belt spoke about le collège d'Alfred and reminded us of how good le collège d'Alfred is. Le collège d'Alfred was to close at least four times. This time, we wanted to make sure that le collège d'Alfred is on a solid foundation because the college trains the next generation of agricultural professionals in the area.

I wanted to thank the member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell for the good work that he did. Now La Cité collégiale will take over. La Cité collégiale is a great community college in my riding. They already train quite a few youth in different professions, so they will be able to take over. I'm sure that they will work with the farmers in that area to make sure that le collège d'Alfred is a strong college, that we have many students there and that we will not see the closure of the college. On the contrary, it's going to grow and be very successful.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member for Nickel Belt for her closing remarks.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It's clear that New Democrats support Bill 40, and we want an expansion to insurance.

The point that I had brought forward was really to remind people that agriculture exists outside of the greater Golden Horseshoe area. It exists in northeastern Ontario; it exists in Nickel Belt. But it has been given a severe blow. That severe blow came when horse racing never was able to continue. Every other racetrack was able to continue, but the one in Nickel Belt—the only one in northern Ontario—was not.

The people on the ground, through the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, have been able to show that there is a strong future for horse racing in Nickel Belt, that all of the pieces have been put together. We're waiting on one last piece, and this is to make sure that the OLG gives a multi-year agreement to Sudbury Downs to run the slot machines at Sudbury Downs. Right now they're month to month, and month to month is not conducive to somebody buying a horse and training it for horse racing. We need this agreement to be multi-year; we need it to be four years. So all I'm asking is for OLG to come to the table, to settle that piece, and we will see horse racing coming back to northern Ontario, coming back to Sudbury Downs, and that will allow our agricultural economy to flourish like it was on a path to do before.

I hope the people responsible at OLG will do the right thing, will come back to Sudbury Downs and strike that deal for the good of horse racing and agriculture.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Wellington–Halton Hills.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Mr. Speaker, agriculture and agribusiness is the most important industry in my riding, and I'm looking forward this morning to speaking in response to the government's Bill 40.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That is not a point of order, but I recognize the member.

Further point of order: I recognize the member from Sarnia–Lambton.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, I'd like to prevail upon the indulgence of the House, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce three guests from my riding. They're here with the Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce: Rory Ring, Rob Taylor and Peter Hungerford.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): To the member for Sarnia–Lambton, that was not a point of order, but we do welcome all of our guests in this Legislature.

A point of order, the member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Prince Edward county and Hastings county are two fine agricultural areas in this province. I really look forward to speaking to Bill 40 this morning—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That is not a—

Mr. Todd Smith: —and I would appreciate that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I don't see that as a point of order.

Further debate? I recognize the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: A point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): To the member from Oxford, I would ask what your point of order is.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My point of order, Mr. Speaker, is that I've heard a lot of discussion in the House this morning that there may not be a full debate on the bill that we're debating.

I've been in this House for 20 years, and I've always been speaking on behalf of my agriculture community. I really find it distasteful that the government would—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. I appreciate it. Thank you very much. Again, I really don't see that as a point of order.

To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Further debate.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate you acknowledging me, and I'm very pleased to speak to Bill 40 this morning.

Our government is very much committed to helping our agri-food partners manage risk. I'm personally very excited to speak on this bill. Even though I come from a downtown urban riding, that is, Ottawa Centre, I can tell you that we, in my community, very much love our farmers and rely on our farmers' markets from the local community to ensure that we've got fresh food available to us. In fact, I have the great distinction of having Canada's Central Experimental Farm—the entirety of that experimental farm—located in my riding of Ottawa Centre, where a lot of research, over the years, has been done. It's a heritage farm and something that my community and I are very proud of.

I mentioned I have four farmers' markets located in my community—one at the Parkdale food market, which is a very exciting place. It has been there for a long, long time. Then, we have a community-run farmers' market called the Main Farmers' Market in old Ottawa East. This is entirely run by the community, and it has grown every single year for the last five years, when it started. Then, the Ottawa Farmers' Market has two locations: one in Westboro, which continues to grow; and then, the Landsdowne farmers' market, which has come back again at Landsdowne Park. If any of my colleagues have not been to Ottawa recently and have not been to Landsdowne Park in the Glebe, I welcome them to come and visit Landsdowne Park, because it's an exciting new place to be. Then, we've got—the Ottawa Farmers' Market has been back. Our hope is, Speaker, that it's going to be a year-round market in the Aberdeen Pavilion, which, as many of you know, is a heritage building. That's why this bill is very important to me and for the well-being of our farmers. That's why we need to move forward with this bill and send it to committee as soon as possible.

We know that business risk management programs like production insurance help producers deal with situations that are outside their control, such as weather, disease and extreme market fluctuation. Production insur-

ance makes timely payments to producers and eliminates the need for costly ad hoc responses to adverse conditions. Ontario's current inability to offer production insurance plans for commodities beyond crops and perennial plants represents a significant gap within our system. When producers suffer losses and don't have production insurance coverage, they may come to us for direct, or ad hoc, assistance. We have seen ad hoc programs cost the province millions of dollars in a single year. Further, production insurance is also premium-based. This means the costs are shared by farmers and the government, which encourages best practices and appropriate sharing of risk. This bill, if passed, will help our farmers better manage risk and encourage greater innovation, job creation and growth in the agri-food sector.

Speaker, as you know, we introduced this important piece of legislation in November 2014. We allowed the debate to continue when we reached six and a half hours of debate so that more members would have an opportunity to present their views on this bill, that all members support.

0940

This bill has seen 11 hours of debate and, according to my count, up to now, there are 76 members who have either spoken to this bill or have participated in the debate during questions and comments.

Speaker, I believe that there has been considerable debate on this bill, and we have heard a wide range of viewpoints, opinions and perspectives. It is time that this bill is put to a vote for second reading and, hopefully, referred to committee, where the real work—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Member from Prince Edward—Hastings, come to order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: As members know—

Interruption.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order. Order. Thank you. I hope that the right wrists got lots of exercise from that little demonstration. I would ask that we allow the member to continue his debate and that we listen intently.

At this point in time, back to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. As I was saying, it's time that the bill is put to a vote for second reading and, hopefully, referred to committee, where the real work takes place. As members know, in committee, members from all parties will hear from all stakeholders who have an interest in this bill. In committee, members will have an opportunity to move amendments to strengthen the bill. At the same time, the House can move on to debate other substantive matters.

There are a number of pieces of important legislation already introduced, which the government would like to debate and move through the legislative process: for example, Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act; Bill 9, Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act; Bill 37, Invasive Species Act; Bill 45, Making Healthier Choices Act; Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act; Bill 52, Pro-

tection of Public Participation Act; and Bill 73, Smart Growth for Our Communities Act.

Speaker, we'd like to spend time debating some of the other important pieces of legislation currently before the House, but we can't until Bill 40 is dealt with. As a result, I move that this question be now put.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please. Order, please. Sit down.

I've had the opportunity to listen to a lot of debate in this sanctuary, the Legislature. We are talking about a very important bill here. I concur that there have been a number of opportunities for members of this Legislature to in fact speak to this bill. But I am of the opinion that there are still others in this Legislature who are prepared to speak to this bill in terms of representing their ridings as well, so I will allow the continuation of debate.

Questions and comments—I'm sorry; you still have time left.

Interjection: No, he doesn't.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): No, he sat down.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I sat down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Speaker. I'm one of the 17 members of the PC caucus who have not spoken to this bill yet. Really, that is an important thing to understand: Over half of the PC caucus has not had the opportunity to speak to this bill. I really have to speak in the strongest terms to the government House leader for moving closure when so many people have not spoken to this bill.

I also want to take issue with his idea, or his statements, about bringing this into committee, where there will be a great deal of further discussion. We have all seen—I have seen directly—how this Liberal government operates in committees. They limit, purposely constrain, the amount of public participation in the development of public policy and legislation. So this view, "Put it off to the committee and then there will be good discussion," is absolutely horse feathers.

If this government truly is interested in developing good public policy, then we will allow good public debate in this chamber. That's where public policy is safeguarded: through debate in this chamber. Over 17 members have not spoken to this bill, just on the PC side. I would suggest to the Liberal members that if they don't want to debate and they want to expedite this bill, then do as your member from Beaches—East York said: Sit down, be quiet and don't be involved in the debate; let others, who have substantive arguments and comments to make, proceed and debate this bill the way it was intended to be debated.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Excellent. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to join in the debate. One of the things that I've talked about before is how

important it is to encourage and support our agriculture here in Ontario. One of the things that I mentioned before, and I think it's very important to highlight, is that for food security, for sovereignty, for independence, nations need to be able to provide their own food. It's something that ensures that the country is able to feed its own citizens. That's one of the most important things we can do as a nation, and that's why efforts and steps to ensure that our farmers are protected would encourage the ability for them to continue to feed us. I think that's absolutely important.

Again, I mentioned before and I want to reiterate this: I personally feel connected to the importance of supporting our local farmers in Ontario as both my parents came from farming families, and they were able to provide a livelihood for themselves for centuries. But in addition, they were able to support their community.

Farmers are the backbone of any society. They are the ones that literally put food on our tables. The more we can actually support them, the more we can ensure that we have a healthier society.

One of the things I notice with a lot of young people is that we've lost connection with where food is grown. I think that when we talk about nutrition and encouraging youth in general in terms of encouraging proper nutrition and to ensure that we have a healthier society, having a connection to where the food is grown, how food is grown, would ensure that people realize the difference between packaged and processed foods and real food that's actually grown from the earth, and the nutritional benefits of that food.

The more we support our farmers, the more we can encourage a healthier society by making sure we purchase local produce, which is healthier, more fresh. We can also ensure that we have that autonomy because we can provide food for our own citizens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I won't take too long this morning, but I guess I would just provide a few remarks. I think that sometimes when people who are interested in the goings on of the Legislature here at Queen's Park in Toronto are following these debates on television, they probably sometimes are less than certain as to exactly what is going on here. I think the machinations sometimes in this place can be very difficult for people following at home to really be sure what's going on. I guess I'm making reference to really what's happening here often is basically what we refer to around here as "inside baseball," where people following on television won't be quite sure as to what the motivations are of individual parties when they're debating particular legislation.

We're here with Bill 40 today, the Agriculture Insurance Act. For those who are interested in this and following it on television, we have now debated this particular piece of legislation for 11 hours, and 77 members of the Legislature have spoken to this particular piece of legislation. We've extended debate beyond the six-and-a-half-

hour threshold so more members would have had the opportunity to speak.

I'm only here today, Speaker, to say to the people who are interested in this issue, who are following it on television: No matter what you may think, please don't be left with the impression that this particular piece of legislation has not had full opportunity to be debated at this point. That's all we're trying to convey to people. We just want them to be left with no impression beyond that: 11 hours of debate; 77 members of the Legislature having spoken to this; six and a half hours, the minimum, extended to 11 hours in total. No matter what you might be left with when you're finished trying to figure out exactly what it is that's going on here, just remember those two numbers: 11 hours of debate; 77 members have spoken to this.

Speaker, anybody who is going to stand in this place and suggest that this legislation hasn't had full debate is trying to, I would say to the people who are following this on television, maybe be a little—what's the word we would use?—to misdirect exactly what's been going on here.

0950

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you. Further questions and comments?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise for a few comments on the House leader's presentation.

I do want to say that I'm pleased at the fact that on my point of order—I was maybe a little bit close to being out of order, Mr. Speaker, but I'm happy to hear that at least the message got out that it's very important for those of us who want to speak to the agriculture bills so that people at home can know where we stand, but even more so, so that people at home can understand what's in this legislation and what impact it will have on them.

I just want to explain to the House leader, because obviously he doesn't seem to understand how important it is that each individual member gets to speak on the issue. Even though the comments may be similar to what someone else has already said, and obviously sometimes it will be totally opposite of what other members have said, I think my people at home have the right—when there's an agriculture bill going through, one of the best two agricultural counties in Ontario has the right to be heard.

I just want to point out that we did an agriculture survey across the province, and people got to reply to the survey. One of the comments, I think, is quite applicable here. One of the farmers said, "Inability to access all the support that is supposed to be out there for young farmers. We are in our early thirties and just recently took over the family farm. It has been two years and we still have not been able to successfully access the government help or guidance that you hear about. Everything is such a complicated, messy process, we are honestly giving up. We are going it alone and doing our best."

That's a southwestern Ontario vegetable farmer. Mr. Speaker, the reason that one is so important is because the vegetable farmers are already part of this program.

This program that we're talking about in this bill is in fact going to extend it to others. But even the vegetable farmers don't understand the program. That's why it's so important that we have the opportunity to speak to this bill so we can get the message out to all our producers of what the government is doing. In this case, most of the time they are wrong in what they're doing.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Oxford.

Back to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services for his final remarks.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to speak again. Although I'm disappointed by your ruling, I respect your ruling. But I do want to restate again that we have had substantive debate on this bill. We've had 77 members speak, over 11 hours of debate from all members of the House talking in substantive terms as to what this bill means to our communities. I had the opportunity, of course, to speak earlier.

But I think it's really important that we take the next step and we take this bill to committee so that we can hear from the farmers directly and we can hear from their associations directly. They want to have a say in this bill as well so that we can be better informed, and if amendments need to be made to the bill to further strengthen the bill, we can make those amendments.

It's interesting, Speaker, because one of the comments I often hear from the broader community out there is, why does it take so long to pass a law? People don't understand. They actually think, Speaker, that as soon as you table a bill, as soon as they hear that a bill is tabled, it's law. They want to know, "How can we use that bill?" It's very disappointing to tell them, "Oh, no, no, no. That was just first reading. Now we have to go through second reading and we have to go through committee and third reading."

The process exists for all the right reasons. I've stood in this House many, many times reminding the members opposite, actually, that we should respect the process at all times—no ifs and buts about it. But there is a time, when we've had ample debate on an issue, that we need to make sure that it moves to the second stage, that it goes to a stage like a committee where you can get, then, the broader community, the outside world, coming inside in this process and being able to influence as to what we, as policy-makers, are doing on behalf of our constituents.

Again, I personally feel strongly that this bill, Bill 40, which is an important bill, has had a substantive amount of debate. Seventy-seven members have spoken in 11 hours of debate. I think we take it to committee so that we can hear from important people who make this province work and they can influence this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Further debate?

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I really enjoyed your ruling this morning and the fact that I am able to bring some remarks on behalf of the folks

who sent me here from Prince Edward and Hastings riding. I do represent Prince Edward county and Hastings county.

Before I get into my remarks, I would just like to make a comment about your ruling and the fact that the government is trying to stifle and muzzle the official opposition and the third party members, who were sent here by their constituents to bring their thoughts to certain pieces of legislation. This government is saying that 11 hours has been enough debate; it has taken them 11 years—11 years—to bring substantial reform with the Agriculture Insurance Act. Eleven hours is by no means much. It gives me the opportunity to bring some remarks on Bill 40 here this morning, and I appreciate that opportunity in spite of the government's best efforts here.

If I could just add one more thing: The House leader for the government mentioned that it does take a long time, in fact, for legislation to become law in this province. That's part of our democratic process. This government wants to shut down democracy so that they can put their agenda forward, whether it's here in the Legislature or at committee. I've been a member of committees where they have tried to do the exact same thing—shut out people from contributing to the debate at committee as well. They're trying to do the same thing to members of the opposition here at Queen's Park.

But I digress. I move on to representing the members of Hastings county and Prince Edward county here in the Legislature. I represent one of the great agricultural ridings in Ontario as well. The Hastings County Plowing Match and Farm Show every August is a great event. It brings farmers from all across eastern Ontario and even from southwestern Ontario and northern Ontario to farmers' fields in Stirling or Quinte West or Tweed. It has been a great event in our riding. It's an opportunity for me, as the member of provincial Parliament—and I know our federal members appear as well at the farm show—to speak face to face with farmers in our community and understand the issues that they're facing, issues like red tape and how it's slowing down progress on their farms and their ability to get their product to market.

We have some great organizations in our riding: the Hastings Federation of Agriculture, which I get to meet with very often, quarterly; and the Prince Edward Federation of Agriculture. The Hastings beef farmers are great, and they always speak to me about the issues that they're facing in their industry. Of course, almost every time that I speak in the Legislature, I speak of the Prince Edward County Winegrowers Association and the great things that are happening in their burgeoning wine industry in Prince Edward county and what it means for tourism in our area. The Egg Farmers of Ontario—we have one of the largest egg producers in the entire province in the Tweed area. Vance Drain and his family are producing some grade-A eggs for the province of Ontario.

But they're all dealing with different issues that aren't included in Bill 40. That's why a lot of us on this side of the House, when we've been bringing remarks on Bill 40, have been expanding it: because this bill could have been

expanded to include more of the issues that farmers are dealing with.

I had the opportunity on Friday in Prince Edward county—and a plug for the great Maple in the County festival, which is coming up on the 28th and 29th of March. It's maple syrup producers in Prince Edward county. There are about 15 of them in all. They do a great job of producing great maple syrup, of course, one of the great exports of our entire country. We are the leader when it comes to maple syrup, and that's a great festival. If you have the opportunity to be there on the 28th and 29th, make sure you visit Fosterholm Farms or Vader's or Hubbs Sugarbush. Those are just some of the great producers that will be having special celebrations on that Saturday and Sunday later this month.

We have a great jewel in our community in the Stirling area; it's called Farmtown Park. I see the member from Northumberland–Quinte West is here. I know that Mr. Rinaldi has been at the events at Farmtown Park along with me over the years. The Quinte Agricultural Hall of Fame that we have there is a great opportunity to recognize members of our agricultural community who have done great things in our community to push that industry forward, to create jobs and to continue the legacy and even start the legacy of great farming practices in Hastings and Prince Edward counties and also in Northumberland county. So that is a wonderful place. If you ever get the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, they have some great vintage farm equipment at Farmtown Park, right next to the Stirling arena in Stirling.

I mentioned red tape. I was fortunate enough, in my first couple of years here as the member for Prince Edward–Hastings, to serve as the small business and red tape critic. That affects every farm in Ontario. They are dealing with red tape. I know that our member from Oxford, who was our agriculture critic for the first two or three years that I was here and is a former Minister of Agriculture, has gone to great lengths to survey farmers across the province and find out what the biggest issue facing the family farm or agri-food business in this province is, and it is red tape. That's what concerns me, not so much about this piece of legislation but other pieces of legislation that the House leader documented when he was talking about some of the important pieces of legislation that are on the agenda here at Queen's Park. There are pieces of legislation that are worrisome for those in our agriculture industry.

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In the case of the Great Lakes Protection Act—and Prince Edward county is right there in Lake Ontario; it's a small island in Lake Ontario. This bill, the Great Lakes Protection Act, is going to supersede all other bills, and there are worries about that bill and what it will mean for farmers, not just out in Lake Ontario but right across this province. These are issues that need to be discussed as well. They're going to supersede the Nutrient Management Act; this bill could potentially supersede the Nutrient Management Act. There are real issues that need to be dealt with in our agriculture industry.

We do know that our farmers are the greatest stewards of the land that we have. They care about the land, because that is their breadbasket; that's where they make their living, and that's where they're feeding Ontario.

Abattoirs are disappearing right across the province because of red tape. We need those abattoirs. If we don't have the abattoirs, we are going to continue to have a negative impact on the agri-food industry—

Mr. Arthur Potts: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I recognize the member from Beaches–East York on a point of order.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I think standing order 23(b) suggests that they should be speaking to the bill. I don't see any way an abattoir would be insured under this. It may be in the broad concept, but it's not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member. I do see this as not a point of order. The member, in my opinion, is in fact addressing the bill. I thank the member.

Continue, please.

Mr. Todd Smith: Abattoirs are very important. I know there aren't many in downtown Toronto, where the member is from, but they're very important to the agriculture industry.

The Kemptville College issue is a huge one for farmers in my riding. We talk about the succession planning, to make sure that we have those next generations coming through. Kemptville College has been around for 100 years. And while the government last Friday—or Thursday, I believe it was—did come to an agreement to save Alfred College, with Boreal College coming on board—this is an important college in eastern Ontario that has graduated most of the farmers that we have, not just in eastern Ontario but across the province. There needs to be the same kind of lifeline for Kemptville College, which is so important to the farmers and agri-food business in my riding.

The Slots at Racetracks Program was devastating in my area. We now no longer have anyone involved in the harness racing industry in my region, in Hastings and Prince Edward counties. They've all had to sell and move because of the devastating effects of that 2012 budget that killed the Slots at Racetracks Program in my riding.

Energy prices are killing farmers in my riding as well. The most common complaint that I hear, after red tape, is the electricity. Some provinces have a special electricity rate for farmers. I'm not sure why we couldn't investigate something like that for our farmers.

As for Agricorp, when I was at the farm show and playing match in Hastings county a couple of years ago, we were talking about the overpayments that came out from Agricorp and the fact that they had to claw back the money that was given to them years earlier. They had invested that money in their farms, and Agricorp, despite the fact that they had made a mistake, comes back and tries to claw back that money from farmers in my area. It has been a huge issue.

But the bottom line is, while this bill is a step in the right direction, and we are supportive of this bill and

getting it to committee so that we can discuss it further, it's 11 years late and it's many, many dollars short.

The members of the government are saying that 11 hours of debate is too long for this bill. There are real concerns for farmers in Hastings and Prince Edward counties, and there are real concerns for farmers in Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke and Oxford and Wellington–Halton Hills and York–Simcoe. This government doesn't want to hear from the members who were elected by their constituents. We need to discuss this further, and I appreciate your ruling this morning, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Of course, it's my privilege to stand in this House and address Bill 40. I did have the opportunity to speak to it at length. I had that chance, and that was a great opportunity for me to learn a lot about agriculture. I am familiar with the term “abattoir,” so I did make that connection already to agriculture. But I appreciate the chance to stand here and add my voice again.

Also, I enjoyed listening to the member from Prince Edward–Hastings' comments. My father lives in his riding and is someone who is thoroughly enjoying the opportunity, in his retirement, to learn a bit about farming, and through him, I'm able to learn a bit about farming. It is a beautiful area, and it is beautiful and rich land. The member from Prince Edward–Hastings mentioned egg farming and the wine industry. It is a rich industry. I can't believe I'm standing in the Legislature and talking about my father and his farming adventures, but I get a kick out of that, and I hope that you will too. He has learned about egg farming and he has built a little place where the chickens can roost and do their egg laying. It has been quite an adventure. Apparently, they start out small and they get bigger, and there's a lot to learn—and this is just an individual.

I think the opportunity for debate and for consultation in committee gives us a chance to actually speak to those who do it not just as a hobby or in their retirement, and certainly draw from the industries and find out how best to inform this bill and, hopefully, others like it. As we know, there's a lot more that could and should be addressed than this bill covers. This is a step in the right direction.

I really appreciated the member from Prince Edward–Hastings' comment about the 11 hours of debate—that they've had 11 years, so let's see if we can't get started.

I look forward to it also getting to committee and hearing from those who would make it better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much for this opportunity. It is very interesting to hear members of the opposition talking about a bill and, in my opinion, holding it back here in this House. When I think about how important this bill is for the farming industry and I hear the opposition talking about “11 years, 11 years”—

well, we, as a government, are trying to create this space where we can send it to committee. Holding it back in more debates is not going to get anything accomplished.

I was very surprised—I'm a new member. There was this very nice convention called ROMA, which is the largest rural association community coming together, and not once in this House was there a question raised during question period by the opposition.

When you talk about the farming industry, we were there. We were at the table. We engaged in conversation with the farmers, and Premier Wynne made it clear—it is time that we move this forward to committee.

I look at this bill—and when I stand up in this House and I think about why I started in politics, it was also to make things more efficient. I'm very much in favour of democracy. I understand. But we had an extensive amount of hours in this House; I will reiterate: This has been debated for close to 12 hours. Over 78 members talked about it, and actually, speakers are talking again in this House. We're talking again. We're just standing up again.

This is my first time, and I am happy to talk about it, but in the sense that we need to bring this closer for our committee. We need to make sure that the people of Ontario, our rural friends, our farmers understand that this is what we want to do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Julia Munro: I'm pleased to have two minutes in which to respond to the member for Prince Edward–Hastings.

I would like to begin by reminding the government members that this is the foundation of our democratic process. It was not many years ago that when you got up to speak, there was no time limit. You could speak for the day or for however long.

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Democracy is not measured by its efficiency. It is the opportunity for thoughtful discussion.

When we look at this particular bill, it is of significant importance, because it takes a step forward in the question of moving from just crop insurance to include animal, so it's called the agricultural products insurance fund.

This is a huge step forward, and it is one in which this bill relies heavily, as many of the government's bills do, on the regulatory process. What people need to understand is that the regulatory process is not a public process. It is by invitation only. It is not required to do anything, in terms of publication, of thoughtful process. It just comes out with regulations at the end.

People need to understand that this, in itself, makes it very difficult for the people—that is, the farming community; the agriculture and the agri-foods community—to have a clue before, de facto, these regulations come into place. This is the only time that people have an opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further questions and comments?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise and join the debate on Bill 40. I just find it interesting, as we go around the room—the member from Prince Edward–Hastings brought up abattoirs, and the parliamentary assistant did too. I believe the Minister of Agriculture stood up and said that that wasn't relevant.

I can tell you that I grew up in London. When I was a child, my father would take my brothers and I to an abattoir just outside of London. We learned that an abattoir is very much directly linked to a conversation about agriculture.

I think that just shows the importance of debate, that we got to stand up today. Hopefully, the member from Beaches–East York learned something new about his portfolio.

The member from Oshawa also brought up that her father has begun a hobby—although I'm sure there's still lots of work to it—of having chickens for eggs. Something that I learned during my time here as an MPP—I had farmers in, and they were talking about the difference between egg chickens and chickens they raise for meat. Growing up in London, although we were surrounded by an agricultural community, of course, we didn't have chickens or cows or pigs. We often had little gardens, but not large gardens. So it was interesting to learn that there is a difference, even within the agricultural community, with those who raise the same animals but they do it for different reasons.

I had an interesting side conversation with the member from London–Fanshawe about my time growing up in London, and how at the Western Fair they used to have the agricultural building, and we would go in and see all the different animals and learn about other purposes for the animals, other than just ending up on the table.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Back to the member from Prince Edward–Hastings for his final comments.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the residents of Hastings and Prince Edward counties here this morning on this piece of legislation, Bill 40.

I'd like to thank the members of the Legislature who have provided some information or their views on my remarks—the members from Oshawa, Ottawa–Orléans, York–Simcoe and Windsor West—for their contributions to this debate as well.

I'd like to thank the members of my riding who have come to me and met with me over the last three years to discuss very important agricultural issues, people like Darrell Russett of the Hastings beef farmers; people like Gayle Grills of the Hastings Federation of Agriculture, and Linda Huizenga; Oliver Haan, from the Ontario pork producers, who comes from the Marysville area in my riding. We have one of the largest chicken-producing regions in the province, in Prince Edward county. Those people have come to me with their issues over the years.

These are all important people, involved in various industries in the agri-food sector in Ontario, in Prince Edward county and in Hastings county. In 10 minutes,

even, Mr. Speaker, it has been very difficult to get their issues on the table to discuss them—people like Vance Drain, from the egg farm up in Tweed that is producing great eggs in this province. There are so many important stakeholders in Prince Edward and Hastings counties who are unable to get their views on the table in 10 minutes. The fact that the government wants to shut out those voices, through me—shutting them out is sickening, actually.

For more than a decade, this government that sits across from us has pushed aside the agriculture insurance issue and beefing up this very important program. At the same time, they've been blowing billions of dollars that could have helped our agriculture industry.

We have four OPP investigations that have taken precedence now. The least we can do is talk about an important industry, the agriculture industry in Ontario.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Seeing—
Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order, please.

Seeing as how it is now 10:15, this Legislature stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1016 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to welcome and introduce to the chamber today representatives from the Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce in the persons of Rob Taylor, Rory Ring, Monica Shepley, Helen Cole, Debbie Harksen, Don Wood, Jim Bradshaw, Ken Faulkner, Leo Stathakis, Lianne Birkbeck, Marty Raaymakers, Murray McLaughlin, Peter Hungerford and Shauna Carr. They're here for Sarnia–Lambton Day both today and tomorrow.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I'd like to welcome several University of Windsor student representatives from the Canadian Federation of Students who are joining us today: Mohamad El-Cheikh, Ronnie Haidar, Abdullahi Abdulla and Anne-Marie Roy. Welcome to Queen's Park, wherever you are.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Today is Friends and Advocates of Catholic Education Day. Everybody is invited to a reception at 5 o'clock. I'm not even going to try and introduce everybody, but I just wanted to especially recognize James Ryan, who is the president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, and Kathy Burtnik, who is the president of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, two of our pages have brought some guests, so I ask members' indulgence to introduce them. On behalf of page Inaya Yousaf, who represents the riding of Toronto Centre, we'd like to wish welcome to her mother, Sasdia Yousaf; her father, Yousaf

Siddique; her sister Iman Yousaf; and her sister Minal Yousaf.

Applause.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you. Shukria.

On behalf of page Arlyne James from Eglinton–Lawrence, we'd like to welcome three of her friends today: Hattie Coburn, Andy Coburn and Signy Matthews.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to welcome my parents, Allan and Sheila Wood. My mom ran for us in the provincial election, so we'd like to welcome her.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to welcome the Dietitians of Canada, who are here with us today. Welcome to Queen's Park. Joining us are Linda Dietrich, executive director, Dietitians of Canada; Mary Lou Gignac, executive director of the College of Dietitians of Ontario; and Leslie Whittington-Carter, who is government relations coordinator, Dietitians of Canada.

Mr. John Yakubski: I want to welcome to Queen's Park today, from my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, Bob Schroeder, who is here with the Friends and Advocates of Catholic Education. Great to see you here, Bob.

Hon. Jeff Leal: It's a great pleasure for me to introduce Allan and Sheila Wood in the members' west gallery—just great constituents of mine in Peterborough. They do a wonderful job of advocating for many causes in the riding of Peterborough.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'd like to welcome today a school from my riding of Scarborough–Rouge River, the Islamic Foundation of Toronto school grade 10 civics class. They're accompanied by teacher Saajida Khadim, and they are in the west gallery.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: In the members' gallery today, I'd like to introduce to the House a long-time resident of Cambridge, Meg O'Brien. Meg is very proud of her son Damien O'Brien, who also joins us—known to very many in this House, a long-time resident of Cambridge and about all things Cambridge, one of the reasons I'm sitting in the House to introduce him today. Thank you and welcome.

Mr. Han Dong: I would also like to welcome the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. I just had a great, productive meeting with two of them, Kathy and Andrew. They're somewhere back there. Hi. I just want to say welcome to them.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: Mr. Speaker. I hope you'll give me some leeway as our Premier sprints to her seat.

My question is in fact to the Premier. Premier, the RCMP raided the headquarters of the Ontario Provincial Police Association on Friday. Yesterday, it was announced

that three senior OPP officials—the president, the vice-president and the CAO—are all taking voluntary leaves of absence while the investigation is ongoing.

Back in mid-December, I wrote to the Chief Electoral Officer and the commissioner of the OPP, and an investigation has been launched ever since that involves your deputy chief of staff and a senior Liberal operative in Sudbury. To this day, both of those individuals have yet to step aside, even as the investigation into their alleged bribes continues.

Premier, why is it that individuals who represent our police know to step aside when they're under investigation, but your staff does not?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite knows that this is an active police matter, and that I'm not going to be able to comment any further—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward-Hastings will come to order, and the member from Lanark will come to order as well.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, on the issue of the Sudbury by-election, I've been very, very clear that there is an investigation ongoing. I've been clear about the trajectory of what my intentions are, in terms of if there is a charge—that Pat Sorbara would step aside. I've made that statement publicly. We're going to let the investigation take place outside of this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier. Premier, I can't believe, in a scrum this morning, you acknowledged that you still have yet to meet with the Ontario Provincial Police about the ongoing investigation. But then again, when pressed on the allegations against your staff, you were quoted as saying, "I will not force someone to resign over allegations I do not believe to be true." That's the quote.

The people who are investigating you know when to do the right thing, and they've done it. The police have done the right thing, Premier. My question is, is your staff above the law?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I take this matter very seriously. I've spoken to it repeatedly. The independent investigation is ongoing.

I just would remind the member opposite that I think he himself said that it's important to "stop interfering in an ongoing investigation and let it run its course."

We have to make sure that kind of interference doesn't happen, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to do that, and I don't think the other side should either.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier: In a news release, the OPPA wrote that it is "in the best interests of the association and its membership, effective immediately," that the members take "voluntary leaves of absence from the OPP Association."

Premier, the opposition, the public and the police know that it is in the best interest that your operatives step aside while they are under investigation. Premier, will

today be the day that your government finally demonstrates integrity? Premier, will today be the day that Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed step aside?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate you acknowledging me.

I want to remind the member opposite again that the OPPA investigation he refers to, or any other police investigation, is exactly that, Speaker—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Stormont will come to order. I would almost ask him to withdraw, if I thought I heard what I thought I heard.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Okay. Thank you.

Carry on.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, these are matters which are being dealt with by the police. These are live investigations. We should respect that. As we've said repeatedly, these are matters to be taken seriously. They need not to be discussed here in this House. I heed the advice of the member opposite when he said let the police do their work; let the police do their investigation. We respect that.

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BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is to the Premier: We have risen again and again in this House to try to compel you to do the right thing concerning the Sudbury by-election scandal by removing Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed from their positions of power and authority. You are so off the mark on this issue.

Yesterday we learned that three senior officials from the Ontario Provincial Police Association stepped aside, or were asked to step aside, when they became the subject of a police investigation.

Premier, will you do the right thing and remove your deputy city chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, and your political bagman, Gerry Lougheed, until this police investigation has been completed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just remind the member opposite that the OPP and the OPPA operate entirely independently and I have no knowledge of the situation there. It's an active police matter and obviously I can't comment on it—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh, I think you knew I was coming for you. The member from Renfrew, come to order, please. The member from Lanark, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been very clear about our position in terms of co-operating with the authorities in an investigation that's taking place outside of this

House. We will continue to work with the authorities as is appropriate, not in this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, what a sad response to such a simple question.

On election night last year, you said that the people had put their trust in you and that you wouldn't let them down. You said that you would lead with integrity, that people would not be taken for granted—such hollow words.

Premier, you love to point to examples of people doing the right thing. Well, here's a clear-cut example of just that. The OPPA officials who are under police investigation had the decency to step aside until the matter is cleared up.

Why is it that police officers in this province can do the right thing, but Liberals can't? Why won't you put Gerry Loughheed and Pat Sorbara in the penalty box until this is completed? Is that simply because of Liberal arrogance?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I think the member opposite knows that we have something called presumption of innocence in our system of democracy, where we do not judge people until they are proven guilty, if that's the case. And that determination is made by the judge, not by the members of this House. We should respect that, Speaker.

In fact, even the Chief Electoral Officer in his report said, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges." The Chief Electoral Officer is absolutely right. It is a matter for a judge to decide if any charges are laid. As we know, in this matter, no charges have been laid. There's a live investigation. We should respect that police investigation and we should not interfere in the matter whatsoever.

In our system of democracy, people are innocent until they are proven guilty. In this case, everyone is innocent because no charges have been laid.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, the arrogance over there is something that I believe you'll live to regret.

I remind you again: Three officials from the Ontario Provincial Police Association have stepped aside. They have done the right thing. We find out today that you haven't even interviewed with the OPP about the Sudbury by-election scandal.

Premier, you were so quick to interview with the Chief Electoral Officer about this scandal, but you can't find the time to interview with the OPP. Is it because the Chief Electoral Officer is a provincial appointee but the OPP carry handcuffs?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, I don't know how many times we need to remind the members opposite that this is not the place or the time in the House to be interfering in a police investigation. In fact, if the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke looked to the member from Leeds-Grenville, he should take his advice, which is not to interfere in an ongoing police investigation.

It is disappointing that the Conservatives, being the official opposition, are not focusing on the real issues that are facing Ontarians. They don't want to talk about things that will help—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark is warned, and the member from Prince Edward-Hastings: second time.

Carry on and finish, please.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: It is time that we focused on the real issues at hand. We need to focus on making sure that we are growing our economy. We need to make sure that we are creating good-paying jobs for all hard-working Ontarians in all four corners of this province. I ask the opposition to really start focusing back on things that people have sent us here to talk about, and that is our economy and our jobs.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. When it comes to the Sudbury bribery scandal, this Premier is in lockdown mode. I have a question, and that is, is that on Pat Sorbara's advice?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that I have answered this question many, many times and I have been very clear—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Next one.

Carry on, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've been very, very clear that there is an investigation ongoing. There was some heckling about how I haven't had a meeting with the authorities. That's being scheduled. I just think the members opposite need to understand that that's a scheduling issue. I have said repeatedly that I am co-operating with the authorities, I will co-operate with the authorities. That was always my intention and it's what we're doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Has Pat Sorbara been providing management issues briefings to the Premier on the Pat Sorbara issue?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, the fact is I've made a public statement. I've made a statement about the situation in Sudbury; I've made a statement about my decision to have Glenn Thibeault be our candidate in Sudbury—Glenn Thibeault, who apparently is an amazing photographer, because the photograph on the front of the Globe yesterday of the terrible derailment in Gogama was taken by our member for Sudbury.

That is an issue that I think is very worthy of our discussion in here: the very important issue of rail safety.

It's one that we should all be calling on the federal government to work with us on, to make sure that we have all the protections in place for people across this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: I'm not sure I got an answer to whether or not Pat Sorbara is providing advice to the Premier on the Pat Sorbara issue.

I know Pat Sorbara wasn't on the Premier's staff when the Premier was promising to change and to make things open and transparent around here. I also notice that the Premier hasn't used the word "openness" once in this place since the Liberal bribery scandal broke, and she only used the word "transparency" once. She won't even say whether or not Pat Sorbara attends cabinet meetings. It's obvious that the Premier is being neither open nor transparent, refusing to answer questions.

I wonder, has Pat Sorbara told the Premier to dial back the rhetoric about openness and transparency around here?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, where I'm going with this—I studied linguistics. This would be an interesting exercise, to go through which words each of us uses in the House and the number of times, and count those words, and then work up an exercise for a linguistics student to see if we could get at the underlying themes that run through our discourse.

Again, let me just say, we are co-operating with the authorities in an investigation that's going on outside of this House. We're working co-operatively with the OPP to set up a meeting, and that's what I mean when I talk about working co-operatively with the authorities. That is happening outside of this House.

The openness that I have demonstrated in terms of committee work, in terms of telling the people of Ontario—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question?

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is for the Premier. The Liberals seem to think that the law, good ethics, integrity and the responsibility to answer questions—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Economic Development, come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —all end at the door to this Legislature. Will the Premier stop hiding behind the OPP investigation and start answering questions, like whether Pat Sorbara continues to attend cabinet meetings?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have been very clear about where I will be answering questions on this specific issue, and that is with the authorities as part of an investigation that's happening outside of this House.

1050

I would just remind the leader of the third party, much as she wants to stand in judgment of people, that the Chief Electoral Officer clearly stated: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

That process is under way. Those decisions have not been made, and they will not be made by the leader of the third party or anyone else in this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: There are four OPP anti-rackets investigations into this Liberal government, but the Premier seems to think it's okay, because the investigation is out there, and she won't tolerate questions in here. This place belongs to Ontarians, and Ontarians deserve answers from their Premier. It doesn't matter whether those questions come in the interrogation room, at a media scrum or right here in the House. Ontarians deserve answers on the Sudbury bribery scandal.

Who made the decision to offer Andrew Olivier a job to step aside?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It actually does matter. Not only do I tolerate questions; I embrace questions. I am here, day after day, to answer questions. That's why I'm here.

Quite frankly, I thought that this morning there might be a question about Gogama. I thought there might be a question about assets and investment in transit and transportation infrastructure. I thought that there might be a question about a whole range of issues that are important business of this government. But I am here and I am answering this question, and I will say that it does matter what words we use.

The member to the right of the leader of the third party knows this. The member for Timmins-James Bay said, "You do have a larger responsibility to make sure you're careful in the use of your words so you don't interfere in any ... way." And that's true for me—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: With all due respect, I think that the opposition and the people of Ontario would rather have the Premier answer questions than embrace them.

The Premier won't say who made the decisions in the bribery scandal. She won't even answer a simple question about the meetings Pat Sorbara has attended since the bribery investigation became public, which has nothing to do with the investigation at hand.

The Premier doesn't have any evidence for her version of events. She won't even explain why the story that she has been clinging to is undercut by every single piece of evidence that we currently know exists. She insists that she behaved nobly and that everything is above board.

If everything is A-okay, can the Premier explain why it is that she's more comfortable answering questions in the OPP interrogation room than she is here in Ontario's Legislature?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: What the Premier wants to talk about, and what we all should talking about, are the issues that are important to Ontarians.

I ask the leader of the third party if she wants to play the word count game. Let's play the word count game. How many times has the NDP spoken about the minimum wage in this House? How many times has the NDP talked about raises for personal support workers in this House? How many times has the NDP talked about raising child care workers' wages in this House? How many times has the NDP talked about public transit in this House? That is the problem. They have lost their soul. They have lost their values. They don't stand for anything. They want to talk about anything but the real issues for Ontarians.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The member doesn't help when he walks by and heckles.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. Start the clock.

The member from Kitchener-Conestoga.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Premier, and Premier, my constituents thank you for tolerating my question today.

Premier, your predecessors Ferguson, Hepburn, Frost, Davis, Peterson and Rae have one thing in common: All had at least one cabinet resignation during their watch, many with more than one and many due to allegations, investigations, and/or concerns that prompted action to ensure accountability. Chris Stockwell, Jim Wilson, Bob Runciman, cousin Greg Sorbara, Mike Colle and David Caplan all went on to take the honourable step aside. Heck, even Dalton McGuinty got out of Dodge when the weight of accountability became too great.

Yesterday, three senior OPP union officials, one a former Liberal candidate, stepped aside.

Premier, take the lead. Ensure that bribery investigations against your deputy chief of staff aren't conducted while the alleged culprit remains in your office—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question from the opposition member. I value the ability in this House to have a debate. I think it's an extremely important part of the democratic process. It's extremely important that the opposition have the opportunity to hold government to account. I think it is incredibly important and central to the workings of a democratic system.

What is also essential is that there be a separation between an investigation that's going on that really is not a political process, that is a process that has to happen apart from the political machinations, the political debate in this House. That has to happen outside the Legislature.

I am taking part in that investigation and working with the authorities. I have said I would do that, and that's exactly what I will do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Back to the Premier.

Premier, your Deputy Premier is right. Your continued rope-a-dope refusal to be accountable is getting so boring.

That said, today marks a significant milestone in your deflect, dither and delay strategy. Today not only marks the passing of the 100th question yardstick on the exact same subject, it also marks exactly one month since the OPP announced their intention to bring you in to discuss the bribery offers clearly heard on the Oliviergate tapes.

Premier, on this milestone day, for your sake, for your government's sake, even for the media's sake, do the right thing. Have Pat Sorbara and Gerry Loughheed step aside, and finally give some straight answers on this whole sordid affair so we can all move on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I've said that we are going to take part in and I am going to take part in the investigation that's happening outside of this House. We've been in touch with the OPP, Mr. Speaker. We're arranging an interview, and we're working with them to arrange dates. If the question is, when am I going to meet with the OPP, the answer is, when we can arrange a date for that to happen. That discussion is ongoing.

I've been very clear that I will work with the authorities but that investigation has to take place outside of this House, not in this Legislature.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier.

Premier, we learned yesterday that the OPPA—after an investigation, members of the executive board stood aside in order to allow things to unfold, so that they took their resignation—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I will try again. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. We've learned that three members of the OPP Association are under investigation by the RCMP. For what? We don't know. But unlike the Sudbury investigation, there doesn't appear to be taped evidence.

It's interesting to note, however, that two of the officials have stepped aside while the investigation is under way. No charges, no findings of guilt or innocence—but they stepped aside.

Why won't the Premier's deputy chief of staff and her police services board appointee step aside while the bribery investigations are under way?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I know nothing about the investigation that's going on in the OPPA. The OPP and the OPPA are separate organizations. They're independent organizations.

On the situation that we're dealing with, I've been clear about my position, I've been clear about the decision that I made regarding the candidacy in Sudbury, and I've been clear that we're working with the authorities on the investigation that is taking place outside of this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Premier, what drives people back home crazy is the double standard that your government has when it comes to accountability. Why is it that members of this assembly, when they've been in similar situations, have done the right thing and stood aside? The OPPA has done the right thing; they stood aside. But you have a different standard. Oh, no, you don't have to follow any type of standard; you don't have to follow the law. People just keep on going the way they were.

People expect their government to be different in the sense of making sure that you take responsibility. So I ask you again: Why is there a double standard for Liberal people while it's not the same for anybody else?

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I think what's driving people crazy at home is that the opposition parties are not focusing on the real issues of the day. That's what people are talking about, and that's what people are concerned about. What they want is for the members opposite to really take the time in question period to hold government to account on issues that are important to them, like creating jobs in their communities, like making sure we're building public transit in our communities, like making sure that we've got quality health care and that good schools are running in our communities. That's what we were elected to do. That's what my constituents want me to focus on, and I'm sure the members opposite are hearing from their constituents as well that they should be focusing on real issues, issues that are directly important to their communities—and stop scandalmongering.

EDUCATION

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is to the Minister of Education. I know that Ontario's publicly funded education system stands as one of the best in the world. This progress that we've made is the result of the dedication, work and vision of this Liberal government working hand in hand with the education community to create a world-class system. I am proud to be part of a government that recognizes the importance of investing in people, specifically through investing in education. We are proud of the progress we have made across Ontario in all of our four diverse, publicly funded school systems: the English public, English Catholic, French public and French Catholic systems.

Our government is focused on ensuring success across all of our publicly funded systems, including the French and Catholic boards. We believe the Catholic boards play an important part of our vibrant and diverse education system. That's certainly true in my great riding of Davenport, where we have a number of wonderful Catholic schools.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can the minister share with this House how we continue to ensure we remain committed to all publicly funded education systems across Ontario, including the Catholic systems?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Thank you, Speaker, and thank you to the member from Davenport, who I know is a strong supporter of Catholic education.

As I mentioned earlier today, the Friends and Advocates of Catholic Education are here at Queen's Park, and I'd like to welcome supporters from the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, who will be here later in the day.

Indeed, as the member says, together we have indeed built an excellent system. Over the past 10 years, we've been able to raise the graduation rate from 68% to 83%, and our government remains committed to providing an excellent education, and that includes the Catholic school system.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister.

We are recognized around the world as having one of the best publicly funded education systems in the English-speaking world. I have two young sons that are part of the Catholic school board here in the city, and I know first-hand this is so true. I know our government's renewed vision, Achieving Excellence, continues to focus on basics like reading, writing and math, while placing an emphasis on other skills like critical thinking, communication and collaboration.

Part of our government's plan entails working with our four diverse publicly funded school systems, the English public, English Catholic, French public and French Catholic, to ensure students continue to achieve excellence and success in my riding of Davenport and across the province. Supporting a world-class education system is part of our government's economic plan that is creating jobs for today and tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: Can the minister share with this House how her commitment to working with all boards across Ontario has helped ensure student success and well-being?

Hon. Liz Sandals: We want every child and student in Ontario to gain the knowledge, skills and personal characteristics that will allow them to be successful, productive and actively engaged citizens. By working with all four publicly funded school systems across Ontario, we have a lot to be proud of when it comes to our accomplishments in education. We have invested \$12 billion in school infrastructure since 2003. All four- and five-year-olds now have access to full-day kindergarten,

and our students remain competitive in math, performing above the OECD average.

On April 9, 2014, we released a renewed vision for education entitled *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*.

We will continue to work with all of our education partners, including our friends from Friends and Advocates of Catholic Education, to ensure that all our students achieve success.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is for the Premier. As we saw yesterday with the RCMP investigation of the OPPA, when others are under investigation, they step away from active duty so that they are unable to share notes and talk to other individuals also under investigation. Yet you have taken a very different course of action with Pat Sorbara. She still works in your office, where she is under your direct supervision and direction. After three weeks of daily questioning by the opposition and the media, it is impossible to believe that you have not discussed the details of the allegations made by the Chief Electoral Officer in his report from February 19.

Why are you more interested in protecting Pat Sorbara than ensuring that the investigation can proceed without concerns that stories are being changed or e-mails deleted?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I challenge the premise of the question from the member opposite. The member opposite can believe what she chooses to believe, but I hope she believes the Chief Electoral Officer when he wrote this: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

Mr. Speaker, that's why there's an investigation going on. It is going on outside of this House and we are working with the authorities, as I said we would.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, it's not what I believe; it's what the people of Ontario believe and what they want answers from. The Chief Electoral Officer's report was released almost a month ago. Police officers, teachers, lawyers, even cabinet ministers understand they need to step away from active duty when investigations are ongoing. Even administrative duty would be an improvement. What makes you think that you and your staff are above the law?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, this is another question where the opposition is asking me to answer questions, which I have done, but they're asking me to answer these questions in such a way that I would be interfering in an investigation that's going on outside of this House. And then they would be the first to criticize if I did that.

The fact is that I have to do what I have said I would do. I said that I will work with the authorities, and we are doing that. We're working to set up a meeting with the

OPP. I've been very clear that we will co-operate with the investigation. But I've been equally clear that that investigation has to take place outside the Legislature.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. I want to pre-empt. I know the Premier might try to answer this question by saying that this is not about guilt or innocence, but I'm talking about the seriousness of the offence. Criminal offences related to bribery—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. The deputy House leader is warned.

Carry on.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you. Criminal offences related to bribery are quite serious. In fact, section 125 of the Criminal Code of Canada: "Influencing or negotiating appointments or dealing in offices," is an indictable offence and can carry up to five years in prison.

Now, it's a serious offence, but the Premier doesn't seem to be taking very seriously at all that her deputy chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, is facing criminal investigations. Does the Premier really think that this scandal shouldn't concern us?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've said over and over again that I do take this matter very seriously. I take it very seriously. I take it seriously enough that I will answer the questions in the appropriate venue, not in the Legislature, where the investigation is not taking place. Those investigative questions are taking place outside of the Legislature.

I think the member opposite is a trained lawyer. I would have thought that he would have understood that that independent investigation needed to take place outside of this House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'm glad the Premier recognizes that this offence is very serious. Let me continue by pointing out that violating the Election Act is also very serious. In fact, a general offence in the Election Act carries a \$5,000 fine, but an offence relating to bribery is considered a corrupt practice and it actually includes a fine of \$25,000 and imprisonment for up to two years. Just like violating the Criminal Code, violating the Election Act is also a very serious offence.

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Can the Premier explain this to me—this is not about the investigation. This is a simple question. Can the Premier explain why, with two serious investigations, that despite these serious penalties, Pat Sorbara shouldn't just be put on leave?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, Mr. Speaker, let me go back to what the Chief Electoral Officer said. I know that the member opposite takes very seriously what officers of the Legislature say. The Chief Electoral Officer said this, clearly stated: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or

innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges.”

Mr. Speaker, there's an investigation going on. It's taking place outside of the Legislature.

HEALTHY EATING

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Every year, Dietitians of Canada and dietitians working all over Ontario help to promote healthy eating through celebrating Nutrition Month in March.

I know that my constituents in Barrie are focusing on promoting healthy eating. The goal of the 2015 national Nutrition Month campaign is to inspire Canadians to eat better at work and make other positive changes for a healthy workplace.

Registered dietitians work in many settings in Ontario, bringing evidence-based nutrition and food advice to consumers, clients and patients. The public can have confidence that registered dietitians, as regulated health professionals, have the training and skills to provide safe, ethical and competent care. Welcome to the dietitians that are here with us today.

Mr. Speaker, through you, I ask the minister: What is our government doing to promote healthy eating and active lifestyles?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Thank you to the member from Barrie for this very important question. I want to begin by acknowledging not just the dietitians that are here in the gallery with us today but the thousands of dietitians right across this great province that are working so hard each and every day to keep Ontarians happy.

It's important that we ask these questions about health care and other topics that are important to Ontarians, especially seeing as the opposition is not asking these important questions of the day.

I want to say that, as we all know, dietitians play such a critical role in keeping people of all ages healthy and helping them to avoid chronic illnesses like diabetes and heart disease. Increasingly, we see people looking to prevention as the key to staying healthy, and we know that people in Ontario are interested in this approach.

That's why our action plan for health care and our Healthy Kids Strategy have both identified healthy living as a top priority.

Thank you again to our dietitians. They do great work. They do great work across this province each and every day.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I'm very proud of our government's Healthy Kids Strategy.

On March 18, the sixth annual Dietitians Day is being celebrated, to recognize the work of dietitians and the value they bring to our health care system. By preventing and managing chronic diseases and promoting recovery, dietitians are a cost-effective investment in the health care system. Promoting access to dietitians' care and

supporting them work at full scope of practice helps achieve health system goals.

My constituents want to know how to access this very important information. It turns out that Ontarians can speak directly with a registered dietitian for free by calling EatRight Ontario.

I know that our government introduced legislation to promote healthy eating and lifestyle. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: What will this legislation entail?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: To the Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: Thank you to the member for this very important question. And she's right: This fall, our government did indeed reintroduce the Making Healthier Choices Act. If passed, the act will require restaurant chains, convenience stores, grocery stores and other food service establishments with 20 or more locations to post the number of calories in standard food and beverage items, including alcohol. What this means is, you will be able to walk into your favourite Tim Hortons and see the calories in an Iced Capp or a doughnut.

I believe this is about empowering Ontarians. We're giving them the information they need so that they can make the right choice. I'm very excited by this bill. I know people across Ontario are looking forward to this legislation. The legislation is going through second reading right now, and I look forward to support from all members to make this law.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Premier. Premier, we learned yesterday that three senior officials from the Ontario Provincial Police Association took voluntary leaves during an ongoing police investigation. Premier, actions speak louder than words. The OPQA is working to maintain their integrity, while you're working really hard to bring shame to the Office of the Premier.

Why have you not required Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed to step aside during the OPP investigation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I want to remind the member opposite that the Chief Electoral Officer has been very clear. He has made no finding of innocence or guilt. In fact, he says, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges." I think that's something that's really important. I think all members should be very careful that they are not making any assumptions about anyone being guilty until they are actually proven so in the court. As we know, Speaker, there is a live investigation; there have been no charges laid. We should respect the process and let the independent authorities do their work as they are mandated to do, because that is their job. We should take that time to focus on issues that are important to our communities. I

know the member opposite has important issues he wants to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Back to the Premier. Premier, you've stood in this House, claiming you are co-operating with the OPP. However, it has been over a month, and you've yet to meet with the police. Average people who have nothing to hide would meet with the police as soon as possible, regardless of their schedule. Premier, wouldn't you agree that delaying the meeting with the OPP is tantamount to interfering with the OPP investigation?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Well, Speaker, if you're talking about hiding, I think what Ontarians want to know is how many jobs—100,000 jobs?—the opposition is going to cut. Why are they hiding? Why are they not telling us exactly what those jobs are going to be? The last estimates that we received is that 22,700 of those proposed 100,000 job cuts are going to be in the education sector. The question is, is that still correct?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I'm going to remind the minister—I've said this on a couple of occasions—when I'm hearing the answer, I need to see it relate at least somewhere to the question. I will put that to him to pull it back towards that.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Absolutely, Speaker.

The point of the matter is that there are important issues that need to be discussed as they relate to our communities; important issues that need to be discussed when it comes to building our communities up. We know the party opposite only believes in cutting good, hard-working public service jobs and not focusing on what's—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Catherine Fife: To the Premier: Premier, I hope you embrace this question on behalf of the citizens of Ontario. I also hope you answer it.

The Premier says she is working with the police, but the Premier's aides, her office and her government are the ones that are at question. We don't really know if she is co-operating, because she's not answering any of our questions. Can the Premier tell Ontarians whether the Ontario Liberal campaign director, Pat Sorbara, has been interviewed by the police?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the measure of my co-operation with the authorities will happen as part of the investigation. It's not a measure of what I'm doing in this Legislature, because the investigation is not taking place in here. I know the member opposite knows that. She knows full well that there has to be a separation between the political discussion that happens in the Legislature and the investigation that is independent. That's why the investigation is taking place outside of the House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Again to the Premier: Actually, what happen in this Legislature does matter. If the Liberals are so insistent that they are co-operating with the police, will the Premier tell Ontarians exactly what assistance she has provided to the police and to Elections Ontario, and explain what the investigators have requested and what has been turned over, please?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, of course what happens in this Legislature matters. It matters very, very much, and it matters that we not interfere with an investigation that is taking place independently of the Legislature. The questions that the member opposite is asking are really the stuff of the investigation. That investigation is taking place outside of the House, and I will be and am co-operating with the authorities.

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PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Han Dong: I have a real question on government programs. My question is to the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games. The Pan and Parapan American Games are coming. With just four months away, the excitement is building. I know many people in my riding of Trinity-Spadina have bought tickets to the games.

We also have a venue in my riding that is being refurbished for the games. The playing fields at U of T are being transformed into two world-class field hockey pitches. The fields are Ontario's first international-calibre field hockey venue, and they will double the number of fields available for the sport in the greater Toronto area. The facility is also expected to be the highest-quality two-turf facility in Canada, according to Field Hockey Canada.

Can the minister tell us more about how we are preparing for the games?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the member from Trinity-Spadina for his great question on government program and policy.

We're in great shape when it comes to the Pan Am and Parapan American Games. So far, we've been able to sell almost 300,000 tickets—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek, come to order.

Hon. Michael Coteau: —we have 52,000 people have signed up to volunteer and, as many of the members know, last week we unveiled our new medals for the Pan and Parapan Am Games. They're incredible medals. In fact, we had a great collaborative effort with the arts sector. Christi Belcourt, a Métis visual artist, helped develop those medals. Like I spoke about last week, it's the first time Braille has been incorporated into the medals for any major game.

We are 17 Fridays away from the opening of these games. We are so proud of the fact that many of our buildings that are set up for these games are being used for community uses, including our athletes' village. I'll talk a little bit about that in the supplemental.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Han Dong: Thank you, Minister, for this answer. I heard that—
Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm not sure that the member heard me the first time, so I'm going to repeat it when everything is quiet. The member from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, come to order.

Put your question, please.

Mr. Han Dong: I encourage the members across, if they have questions, please use their opportunity to ask those questions to the minister directly, not to use my time.

The legacy of these games is truly amazing. These new sports facilities are built for generations of Ontarians to enjoy. The venues will not only be used by our high-performance athletes, but also by beginners and students who are just learning new sports.

As a post-game legacy, the Pan Am fields will host a number of different sports at U of T. They will add to the existing sports facilities, benefiting students on campus and members of my community.

Can the minister tell the members of this Legislature about the legacy the athletes' village will leave behind?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I want to tell you a bit about the athletes' village. This village is part of a broader revitalization of the West Don Lands and Toronto's waterfront, and it has accelerated the pace of the development in that area by 10 years.

The project includes 808 market housing units, 100 affordable housing units and 253 affordable rental units. It also contains, for the first time, a residence for George Brown students—it's a 175,000-square-foot, eight-storey building that will be home to 500 students per year—and an 80,000-square-foot new YMCA facility. The YMCA facility includes a gymnasium, swimming pool, fitness studio, space for youth and community-accessible green roofs. Ten per cent of the units will be fully accessible in the actual building, which I think is an incredible accomplishment for this government. But most important—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question?

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is for the Premier. Your chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, is currently under OPP investigation involving the Sudbury bribery scandal, yet she continues to have access to and ability to influence cabinet decisions and senior members of your inner circle. When three OPP staff became subjects of a police investigation, they immediately stepped down so as to not keep asserting their influence on that office and tarnishing the reputation of their association.

Premier, why are you continuing to allow Pat Sorbara to stay in her position in the midst of a police investigation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, Speaker, I remind the member opposite—and he's heard the answer before—that we have something called presumption of innocence in our system of democracy. We should respect that. In fact, the Chief Electoral Officer restated that very clearly in his finding. If you like, I can read that passage to him again during the supplementary.

I think what we really need to focus on are issues that are important to our communities. I'm sure the member opposite has a hospital that he wants to build in his community. This will be a great opportunity for him to advocate on behalf of his community by speaking on those very important issues.

Let the police do their work, which they're very much capable of and responsible to do. Speaker, as you very much appreciate, it will be highly inappropriate if we, as a government, interfere in that police investigation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Back to the Premier: The people of my riding believe that law and order is a fundamental tenet of democracy, and no one, including the Premier, is above the law. The OPP union put their membership and integrity first. You're not doing that. Your steadfast refusal to rise above your own political needs and put the interest of the public first is a serious breach of the integrity of your office. You are not above the law, Premier.

Will you do the honourable thing and ask Miss Sorbara and Mr. Lougheed to step down from their staff positions until the bribery investigation is complete?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, the member is absolutely correct: No one is above the law, nor is this a kangaroo court. We need to make sure that there's a process in place, and we should respect that process. The process dictates that people in our system are innocent until they are proven guilty. They are not to be judged as the members opposite are trying to judge certain individuals when not even one criminal charge has been laid.

I'll read again what the Chief Electoral Officer said in his own ruling: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. These decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

I ask the members opposite to let those prosecutors and judges do their jobs.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier tell us how many of the Premier's staff and inner circle—including the Deputy Premier herself, who seems to know about your conversations with your soul—have been interviewed by the OPP anti-rackets division?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, I remind the member opposite that we should not be talking about a live police investigation in the House. We should focus on issues

that are important to the people of Ontario. That is the responsibility that has been given to us. The Chief Electoral Officer has been very, very clear that he's making no judgment in terms of innocence or guilt of any individual, and he has asked, in his report, that we let the prosecutors and judges do their jobs.

I respectfully and humbly ask all members to respect the ruling of the Chief Electoral Officer, to respect the work that the OPP is doing in that regard and not meddle in a live police investigation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: The Premier keeps insisting that she won't answer questions because there's a police investigation ongoing. Who on the Premier's staff and who at the Ontario Liberal Party have the police requested interviews with, and who has been interviewed?

I'm having visions: gas plants, Ornge, eHealth. I'm having visions. It's like an instant replay, Speaker. Here we go again. This is scandal number seven. Keep going, guys. You're doing a great job.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, I think the member should be focusing his vision on minimum wage. He should be focusing his vision on supporting personal support workers. He should be focusing his vision on supporting our child care workers. He should be focusing his vision on building good public transit. He should be focusing his vision on making sure that there are good-paying jobs in our communities. That is what Ontarians have asked us to work on. It's a very sad day when we see that even the NDP has stooped so low that they focus on just scandalmongering.

We know there's a process that is ongoing. We know there is a live police investigation. We should respect that police investigation and let the OPP do their work.

1130

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: My question is for the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry. It's a very important policy question, one that I know that my constituents in Cambridge care very deeply about.

This is the time of year that Ontario's secondary and post-secondary students look for job opportunities for the summer ahead. In previous years, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has been a leading ministry for providing summer jobs to youth in Ontario. Early last year, my own son Alex applied for such a position and spent his spring and summer as a fire ranger.

Youth in my riding in Cambridge are looking to learn new skills and develop real employment experience that they can carry with them into the workplace. However, many youth are concerned about whether or not they'll be able to find a summer job this year.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, would the minister please inform the House whether or not his ministry will again be hiring young people this summer?

Hon. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the member from Cambridge for giving me an opportunity to highlight this.

Last week, in Thunder Bay, I was fortunate to be part of an event out at a Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry fire base, where we were able to highlight for students who are looking for summer job opportunities MNRF's program. Once again, this year we'll be offering somewhere in the neighbourhood of 1,900 summer youth employment opportunities right across the province.

Speaker, it's important to note that those job opportunities will be in 30 different communities. They're in close proximity to 30 different communities right across the province of Ontario. I highlight for my northern colleagues and friends that about 800 of that 1,900 will be in northern Ontario.

One of the programs is a youth stewardship program, Speaker. Given our ministry's commitment to biodiversity, to wetlands and invasive species, it's very important work that they're doing as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you to the minister for his response and his commitment to providing summer jobs to youth in Ontario.

I know from knocking on doors in Cambridge and North Dumfries that many parents and youth were disappointed when the opposition Conservatives voted against the Youth Jobs Strategy in 2013, so they are happy to hear that our government remains committed to helping young people find summer jobs.

I also know that parents and young people want to find summer youth employment that provides meaningful experience, builds their resumé and gives them real hands-on experience in a field of work that interests them.

Many youth in my riding are looking for summer jobs that move them out from behind a desk, out of the offices and into Ontario's vast natural environment.

Speaker, again through you, will the minister please tell this House how his ministry is providing summer job opportunities that provide hands-on experience in Ontario's great outdoors?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Once again, I thank the member from Cambridge for the question. Speaker, I really want to highlight one of the programs that we offer through summer employment. It's called the First Nations Natural Resources Youth Employment Program. Confederation College works to provide training. They're employed through MNR.

I had an opportunity to go to that graduation ceremony last summer down at Marina Park in Thunder Bay. When I listened to those young men and women speak at that graduation ceremony, I can tell you that it was very emotional and very moving. We actually witnessed, I would say—and I'm not overstating it at all—young men and women, who, through this work experience, had just participated in something that for them was very transformative. I don't think I'm overstating it at all.

This program had availed them of an opportunity to truly engage in something that they felt incredibly passionate about. I think people who work in MNRF take that with them no matter what their jobs are. Even if they don't stay in MNRF, when they leave this ministry, they

have learned life skills and have had great mentorship opportunities.

This particular program and opportunity for me was wonderful. I want to thank the college, John Hatton from the college and MNRF for providing that opportunity through this particular program for aboriginal youth.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jim McDonell: To the Premier: Three senior OPPA members came under investigation and did the right thing by stepping aside and ensuring that they can't influence the process that's being investigated.

Your deputy chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, is also under investigation, for bribery, but continues to have access to your office, your staff, ministers and civil servants, influencing public policy. By refusing to show leadership in your own office, you are dragging your own office and our democracy into the muck.

Premier, when will you end this travesty and remove Pat Sorbara and Gerry Loughheed Jr. from their positions until the investigation—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I thank the member opposite for the question. Again, if he's going to ask the same question that all his colleagues have asked over question period, he'll get the same answer, which is that this is a live police matter and it's being investigated by the police and we should respect that.

I know the member's community, Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry, very well, and I know that there are some important issues in his community. I'm surprised that the member opposite is not focusing on talking about jobs in his community. I know the previous member, Jim Brownell, who was a great member of this Legislature, would not waste any time but to talk about his own community. It's sad to see that the member opposite, when he had the opportunity through a question, is not doing that.

This is a police matter, Speaker. We should respect that. We should let them do their job. As the Premier said again and again, she is co-operating. I think that's the proper course, and we should focus back on issues that are important to our respective communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jim McDonell: My residents of Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry want a government that follows the law.

In due time, we will know why the RCMP executed a search warrant at the OPPA. But you have known for months that your staff is under investigation for bribery. In Canada's Criminal Code, bribery includes public appointments and is punishable by up to 14 years in prison. Everyone but you realizes that this is a serious crime, yet you and your government stand by two Liberal operatives who are on tape apparently doing just that.

When will you show some leadership in your own office and remove the stench of bribery by having Pat Sorbara and Gerry Loughheed Jr. step aside until the investigation is complete?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I'm sure the member opposite knows the law of the land is that you're presumed innocent until found guilty.

In this case, Speaker, there have been no charges laid. The Chief Electoral Officer is absolutely clear that he's not making any determination of innocence or guilt, and he's actually asking all of us to respect the process and let the prosecutors and judges do their work.

The members opposite should also respect the law and let the police do their work.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change on a point of order.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Just a quick point of order: Our page captain today—Inaya's parents and her family are here. That's Sadsia, Yousaf, Iman—and it was Minal who was heckling the opposition earlier.

DEFERRED VOTES

INTERIM SUPPLY

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on a motion for interim supply.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1137 to 1142.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Would all members please take their seats.

On March 9, Mr. Naqvi moved that the Minister of Finance be authorized to pay the salaries of the civil servants and other necessary payments pending the voting of supply for the period commencing April 1, 2015, and ending on September 30, 2015, such payments to be charged through the proper appropriation for the 2015-16 fiscal year following the voting of supply.

All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Meilleur, Madeleine
Anderson, Granville	Fraser, John	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Baker, Yvan	Gravelle, Michael	Murray, Glen R.
Balkissoon, Bas	Hoggarth, Ann	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Ballard, Chris	Hoskins, Eric	Naqvi, Yasir
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hunter, Mitzie	Oraziotti, David
Bradley, James J.	Jaczek, Helena	Potts, Arthur
Chiarelli, Bob	Kiwala, Sophie	Qaadi, Shafiq
Colle, Mike	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Coteau, Michael	Lalonde, Marie-France	Sandals, Liz
Crack, Grant	Leal, Jeff	Sergio, Mario
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit	Sousa, Charles
Del Duca, Steven	Martins, Cristina	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Matthews, Deborah	Thibeault, Glenn
Dhillon, Vic	Mauro, Bill	Vernile, Daiene
Dickson, Joe	McGarry, Kathryn	Wong, Soo
Dong, Han	McMahon, Eleanor	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, James	McMeekin, Ted	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Bailey, Robert
Bisson, Gilles
Clark, Steve
DiNovo, Cheri
Dunlop, Garfield
Fedeli, Victor
Fife, Catherine
Forster, Cindy
French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne
Gélinas, France
Gretzky, Lisa

Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hatfield, Percy
Hillier, Randy
Horwath, Andrea
Jones, Sylvia
Mantha, Michael
Martow, Gila
McDonnell, Jim
Miller, Norm
Miller, Paul
Munro, Julia
Natyshak, Taras

Nicholls, Rick
Pettapiece, Randy
Sattler, Peggy
Scott, Laurie
Singh, Jagmeet
Smith, Todd
Tabuns, Peter
Taylor, Monique
Vanthof, John
Walker, Bill
Yakubuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 54; the nays are 38.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1146 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: On behalf of the PC caucus, I'd like to take this opportunity today to welcome, basically, Catholic education day here at Queen's Park. There has been a strong lobby today and there is also a reception this afternoon at 5:30 down in the legislative dining room.

I just wanted to read a statement that came with the invitation from the Catholic education stakeholders. It says here: "Catholic schools have been a part of Ontario's communities for over 170 years. They are an integral part of Ontario's public education system, helping millions of students to achieve their full spiritual, academic, physical and emotional potential. Catholic schools respond to the aspirations and goals of approximately one third of the Ontario electorate and we are grateful for the publicly stated support of all three of Ontario's political parties."

That was signed by Thomas Cardinal Collins of the Catholic diocese of Ontario, Kathy Burtnik of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, and James Ryan from OECTA.

I also want to say at this point that I had an opportunity in my riding over the last few years, until his passing, to work with Father Carl Matthews, who was a priest, of course. He worked diligently on getting full funding for Catholic education back in the 1980s. He became an inspiration to me and also somewhat of a mentor to me on Catholic education.

I just want to say, on behalf of our caucus, welcome to everyone here today. I hope they take part in the activities. I hope people have an opportunity to meet with their Catholic representatives, because they do provide a really great option for education here in the province of Ontario.

GO TRANSIT

Mr. Wayne Gates: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak today. I'm always happy to rise in the House and talk about Niagara.

Since his election, the new regional chair, Alan Caslin, has advocated for one of the biggest issues in my riding: bringing a two-way, daily GO train all the way to Niagara Falls. I'm happy to work with all the regional councillors—those who are returning and those who are new—to make a daily GO train to Niagara a reality. I'm happy to say that after the last municipal election we once again have a united Niagara. It isn't often you can get 12 municipalities to agree on anything, but in Niagara we've done it.

I'd also like to personally thank the mayors in my riding—Lord Mayor of Niagara-on-the-Lake Pat Darte, Mayor Jim Diodati of Niagara Falls, and Mayor Wayne Redekop of Fort Erie—for their continued support to bring a GO train to Niagara. It doesn't matter what area they represent, who they represent or what political party they side with: Everyone agrees we need a GO train from Toronto to Niagara Falls.

I invite everyone here and watching at home to join us this Friday, March 13—Friday the 13th—at 11:30 in Niagara Falls to kick off a new public campaign to support bringing a GO train to Niagara. The Premier said that GO to Niagara was a high priority. The member from St. Catharines and caucus chair of the Liberal Party said that he could see it coming in 2015. The people of Niagara want it in 2015. Let's bring the GO train all the way to Niagara Falls in 2015.

JAG PILLAY

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: It is with a heavy heart that I rise today in memory of a dear friend who recently passed away, a selfless social advocate and a true giant in the South African Canadian community. Jag Pillay, or Uncle Jags, as he was affectionately known by those close to him, was a devoted father to his children Kamerni and Anisha, and a doting grandfather to Spenser, but he was much more than that. He spent his entire life working tirelessly for others.

He was one of the founding members of the Nirvana Cultural Society and the Canadian African national congress of South Africa, and he played a central role in supporting numerous organizations and social causes throughout the world, including the Stephen Lewis Foundation, Princess Margaret hospital, Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, organ transplant research in Toronto, earthquake relief in Pakistan and Haiti, and victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy in India. The list goes on.

The defining quality about Jags is that he was selfless, always working hard for others. He taught me so much about what it means to help others. Perhaps the most incredible thing about him was his humility. He never sought public recognition or personal gain for his efforts. He was a silent warrior, a quiet crusader and an unspoken hero. His only priority was to help others in any way that he could.

The outpouring of support for Jags at his funeral last Saturday was overwhelming, and it was truly an honour to have been asked to take part in his service. Jag Pillay made the world a better place, and he leaves behind a legacy of leadership, compassion and kindness.

Uncle Jags will be greatly missed.

SARNIA LAMBTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Mr. Robert Bailey: I rise today to inform the members of the Legislature that tomorrow at noon the Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce will be hosting the much-anticipated Sarnia-Lambton Day reception at Queen's Park.

The Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce is the area's most influential business advocacy group, representing over 1,000 businesses and over 17,000 employees. They have come to Queen's Park with innovative, made-in-Lambton solutions to some of Sarnia-Lambton and Ontario's biggest issues.

During meetings on March 10 and 11, they will be presenting ideas to members of this Legislature and of the government and opposition that will drive economic growth and prosperity in southwestern Ontario, ideas like growing Sarnia-Lambton's burgeoning bio industries, building the critical heavy-haul trade corridor, building the momentum for the Sarnia refinery Saber project, increasing technology commercialization and supporting Lambton College's centre for health education.

Though the ideas have been created in Sarnia-Lambton, if they are supported by this government and members of this Legislature, the spinoffs would provide all of Ontario with much-needed jobs, tax revenue and research.

I want to thank all the members of Sarnia-Lambton's delegation who have come to Queen's Park today for this very important work. Once again, I want to extend the invitation to all members and staff to join us tomorrow for Sarnia-Lambton Day at Queen's Park in rooms 228 and 230.

BOWL FOR KIDS SAKE

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Last weekend, I took part in the Big Brothers Big Sisters Bowl for Kids Sake in my riding of Windsor West. Big Brother Big Sisters of Windsor Essex hosts this event to raise money to support their programming for young people in our community. In 2014, this event included 800 bowlers and raised over

\$52,000 to support five youth mentoring programs coordinated by Big Brothers Big Sisters.

At this year's event, I was proud to see so many others in our community taking part, including educators from OSSTF. My team, aptly named Windsor West Orange Crush, was joined by Windsor corrections officers from OPSEU Local 135. Although they out-fundraised me, I think I out-bowled their captain and Local president Randy Simpraga. I was also glad to see our local firefighters come out and show their support.

I would like to add that these men and women put themselves at risk for us every day and yet still had the time to come out and support our community's youth on their night off. It's important that we continue to give these emergency responders the tools they need to do their job safely so they can return to their families and participate in community events like Bowl for Kids Sake.

Events like Big Brothers Big Sisters of Windsor Essex Bowl for Kids Sake are true community-building partners, and I would like to thank our community leaders for their ongoing support of this and similar events. I hope everyone in this chamber will come to Windsor and bowl with me next year, but—full disclosure, Mr. Speaker—I did bowl over 100.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY JOURNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE LA FEMME

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: International Women's Day is an opportunity to celebrate the successes and contributions of women all around the world in the past and present. On March 6, I was able to recognize five outstanding Orléans women who have made significant contributions to our community.

Janet Gray is the chairwoman of the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, known as CARP, and serves as president of the Orléans Women Business Connections and the Ottawa Women's Canadian Club.

Kathy O'Neill, vice-présidente, planification et services de soutien à l'Hôpital Montfort, est une chef de file dans la promotion de la santé et du bien-être des femmes et des jeunes filles au sein de la communauté d'Orléans.

1510

Laura Dudas is the long-time president of the Blackburn Hamlet Community Association, who has engaged women in the democratic process by running in last year's municipal elections.

Kathy Smart is a celebrated health icon and is known as North America's gluten-free expert, who has encouraged people to live and eat healthier.

Last but not least, Yasmine Fathers is the president of the Bradley Estates Community Association, where she advocates continuously for her neighbours.

Félicitations à toutes ces femmes extraordinaires. You exemplify the kindness, caring and commitment we want to see across our province.

UNIVERSITY LABOUR DISPUTE

Mrs. Julia Munro: I would like to extend my regrets that CUPE Local 3903, representing teaching assistants, graduate assistants and research assistants, voted against the latest offer by York University and will therefore remain on strike.

It is unfortunate that students and families, who are not at the negotiating table, will suffer from classes being dismissed while the strike persists. I understand that these families, some of whom are constituents of mine, rightfully have concerns, and have a lot at stake. When students apply for and attend university programs, they have no intention of seeing their studies delayed, and students are eager to complete the four years of study ahead of them.

Strikes such as the ones occurring now at York and at the University of Toronto make it difficult for students to get the most out of their post-secondary education. These strikes also have the unfortunate effect of tainting students' views of their educational institutions and their experiences attending those institutions.

It is my hope that the unions and universities can resolve these work-related issues as soon as possible so that students may resume their studies.

WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I rise in the House today to speak to you about mental health in the workplace.

We know that one in five Ontarians will be diagnosed with a mental illness in their lifetime. Further, the annual cost of mental illness and addictions in Ontario is estimated to be approximately \$40 billion.

The chamber of commerce in my riding of Burlington understands this issue and has shown great leadership with a policy resolution to the Ontario Chamber of Commerce on workplace mental health. Many members of the chamber are already showing leadership in this area too, demonstrating that promotion, prevention and early interventions lead to a positive return on investment.

Last Friday, March 6, together with the Minister of Labour, we hosted a round table on workplace mental health at the Burlington chamber to engage with companies that have introduced strong workplace mental health programs for their employees and to draw upon their experiences. Leaders of businesses from all sizes—small consulting firms to Bell Canada—shared best practices for accommodation and prevention. Clinicians joined us too, as did our community foundation, which has ably highlighted this issue in its ongoing excellent work.

We heard from a representative at Cogeco about the role HR is playing to support mental wellness. We heard about Bell Canada's mission to build leaders within their company who can identify the signs of distress, start a conversation with an at-risk employee and access appropriate resources. We also heard about how the mental health dialogue is rapidly changing within the Halton Regional Police Service.

The CEO of the Ontario Psychological Association, here today for a Queen's Park reception, shared with us

the steps they are taking with business leaders and front-line personnel, as well.

This round table was not the first conversation we've had on the topic of mental health, nor will it be the last. I look forward to continuing the work we've started together to make positive changes to workplace mental health, and I thank all of the leaders in my riding for their leadership on this issue.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms. Daiene Vernile: In my riding of Kitchener Centre, we staged our first International Women's Day event this past Friday. The theme for this year, as mandated by the United Nations, was "Make It Happen," so we invited three very successful women in our community to share with those who gathered how they make it happen every day. I asked each guest to tell us about their big life goals and who inspired them.

Our first speaker was Sara Casselman, operations manager at the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region. Sara is at the front line of public service, advocating for assault victims.

Meghan Hennessey, only in her late 20s, was very inspiring to the young women who attended. She works at a high-tech company that produces robots in Kitchener. With relatively few women employed in the tech field, Meghan showed us the possibilities for the future.

Karen Redman is a well-known local public figure. As Kitchener Centre's first elected female federal member of Parliament, Karen is now serving on regional council, sharing her know-how and continuing to serve our community. She also encouraged us to think big, to not be afraid to make lofty goals and to see the value in reaching out to mentors.

Mr. Speaker, I owe a huge thanks to my staff—Shelly, Carolyn, Alice and Tony—who made this event happen. Next year, we hope to stage an even bigger and better International Women's Day event in Kitchener Centre—and hopefully I'll have my full voice then.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received the report on intended appointments dated March 10, 2015, of the Standing Committee on Government Agencies.

Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted by the House.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

990046 ONTARIO INC. ACT, 2015

Mr. Natyshak moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr16, An Act to revive 990046 Ontario Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

PETITIONS

DOG OWNERSHIP

Mr. Todd Smith: I have a healthy pile of petitions here.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and mixed breeds; and

"Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective approach to dog bite prevention; and

"Whereas problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners' Liability Act (2005) and any related acts, and instead implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and types."

I will sign this and send it to the table with page Victoria.

MISSING PERSONS

Ms. Catherine Fife: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario does not have missing persons legislation; and

"Whereas police are not able to conduct a thorough investigation upon receipt of a missing person report where criminal activity is not considered the cause; and

"Whereas this impedes investigators in determining the status and possibly the location of missing persons; and

"Whereas this legislation exists and is effective in other provinces; and

"Whereas negotiating rights to safety that do not violate rights to privacy has been a challenge in establishing missing persons law;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We ask that the Attorney General's office work with the office of the privacy commissioner to implement missing persons legislation that grants investigators the opportunity to apply for permissions to access information that will assist in determining the safety or whereabouts of missing persons for whom criminal activity is not considered the cause."

It's my pleasure to affix my signature and give this petition to page Andrew.

1520

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I agree with the petition, affix my signature and give it to page Eileen to bring forward.

REALTORS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: "To the Legislative Assembly"—*Interjection.*

Mr. Victor Fedeli: No, no, the yellow ties can stay. *Interjection.*

Mr. Victor Fedeli: No, I would never do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's about wind turbines.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario real estate salespeople are prevented by the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act, 2002 from incorporating their businesses through a personal real estate corporation; and

"Whereas other regulated professions, including chartered accountants, lawyers, health professionals, social workers, mortgage brokers, insurance agents, architects and engineers, can all form personal corporations; and

"Whereas permitting real estate salespeople to incorporate would create jobs and increase government revenue;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to pass the Tax Fairness for Realtors Act, 2015 and give real estate professionals in Ontario the ability to form personal real estate corporations."

I agree with this, sign my name and give it to page Rachel.

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and mixed breeds; and

"Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective approach to dog bite prevention; and

"Whereas problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners' Liability Act (2005) and any related acts, and to instead implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and types."

Of course, I agree. On behalf of the 1,000 dogs or more that have been euthanized because of this through no fault of their own—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Further petitions?

WATER FLUORIDATION

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I have a petition here addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly. It's concerning "Fluoridate All Ontario Drinking Water.

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable

to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I support this petition, and I will sign it and hand it over to page Morgan.

HUNTING

Mr. Jeff Yurek: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the greater hunting community disagrees with the decision made by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry ... to close 'McGoogan Tract' for hunting purposes;

"Whereas the MNRF did not consult with the public/hunting community on their decision to close this piece of crown land;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To reopen 'McGoogan Tract' to allow hunters in the community to hunt on this piece of crown land during the hunting season."

I agree with this petition and affix my signature to it.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"We request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario keep the obstetrics unit open at Leamington District Memorial Hospital."

This may be the shortest petition ever, but I fully support it and sign my name to it and give it to page Dhairya.

CREDIT UNIONS

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have another petition addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario support our 1.3 million members across Ontario through loans to small businesses to start up, grow and create jobs, help families to buy homes and assist their communities with charitable investments and volunteering; and

"Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario want a level playing field so they can provide the same service to our members as other financial institutions and promote economic growth without relying on taxpayers' resources;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Support the strength and growth of credit unions to support the strength and growth of Ontario’s economy and create jobs in three ways:

—maintain current credit union provincial tax rates;

—show confidence in Ontario credit unions by increasing credit union-funded deposit insurance limits to a minimum of \$250,000;

—allow credit unions to diversify by allowing Ontario credit unions to own 100% of subsidiaries.”

Speaker, I agree with the petition, affix my name and give it to page William to bring forward.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Todd Smith: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Auditor General of Ontario defines the global adjustment charge on hydro bills as ‘mostly consisting of the difference between the market price and the price paid to generators as set by the board for OPG or under contract with the government or the OPA’; and

“Whereas the Auditor General says the global adjustment has been rising steadily over the last few years and is expected to continue to rise from \$700 million (prior to the 2009 passage of the Green Energy Act) to \$8.1 billion by 2014; and

“Whereas the Liberal government’s 2010 fall economic statement stated that hydro bills are expected to rise 46% by 2015, and that new renewable power generation would account for 56% of that increase; and

“Whereas small to mid-sized businesses across Ontario are seeing the global adjustment portion of their monthly hydro bills increase significantly to the point that it is now larger than the actual energy portion of their bills; and

“Whereas many of those businesses are now delaying investment or hiring, or both, and considering either closing or moving outside of the province of Ontario as a result of delivered-to-market industrial energy rates that are now the highest in North America;

“We, the undersigned, do hereby petition the government of Ontario to reverse course on its expensive energy policy by cancelling the feed-in tariff ... subsidies and treating Ontario’s energy as an economic development tool so that it once again is a competitive advantage for Ontario in retaining and attracting jobs and investment.”

Thank you, Speaker. I’ll sign this and send it to the table with Fardin.

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I too have one of those short petitions.

“We request that the Legislative Assembly of Ontario keep the obstetrics unit open at Leamington District Memorial Hospital.”

I fully agree with this petition. I will sign it and give it to page Madison to take up to the Clerk.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have another petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly about fluoridating all Ontario drinking water. It has been read out a couple of times. I just found this, so I’m going to just paraphrase it quickly.

“Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

“Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

“Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

“Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

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“Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario.”

I agree with this petition, sign my name and give it to page Andrew to bring forward.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I have a petition here to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the purpose of Ontario’s Environmental Protection Act (EPA) is to ‘provide for the protection and conservation of the natural environment.’ RSO 1990, c. E.19, s. 3.; and

“Whereas ‘all landfills will eventually release leachate to the surrounding environment and therefore all landfills will have some impact on the water quality of the local ecosystem.’—Threats to Sources of Drinking Water and Aquatic Health in Canada;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That section 27 of the EPA should be reviewed and amended immediately to prohibit the establishment of new or expanded landfills at fractured bedrock sites and

other hydrogeologically unsuitable locations within the province of Ontario.”

I affix my signature as I agree with this petition.

LGBT CONVERSION THERAPY

Ms. Catherine Fife: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas in 2013 the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) removed transgender and gender non-conforming identities from the mental disorders category;

“Whereas LGBT youth face 14 times the risk of suicide compared to their heterosexual peers and 77% of trans respondents in an Ontario-based survey had seriously considered suicide with 45% having already attempted suicide;

“Whereas an Ontario study found that transgender youth aged 16-24 have a 93% lower suicide rate when they feel supported by their parents in the expression of their gender identity;

“Whereas LGBT conversion therapy seeks to prohibit gender and sexual orientation expression, has no professional standards or guidelines in how it is practised and is condemned by all major professional associations of health care providers; and

“Whereas Ontario’s Ministry of Health currently funds LGBT conversion therapy through OHIP;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Health immediately cease funding all known forms of conversion therapy.”

It’s my pleasure to affix my signature and give this to page Riley.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

SUPPLY ACT, 2015

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2015

Mr. Bradley, on behalf of Ms. Matthews, moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 72, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015 / Projet de loi 72, Loi autorisant l’utilisation de certaines sommes pour l’exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2015.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I’m delighted to be here today to discuss the Supply Act for the 2014-15 fiscal year. I will be sharing my time with the parliamentary assistant for the Treasury Board Secretariat, the member for Etobicoke Centre.

The Supply Act, if passed, will give the Ontario government the legal spending authority to finance its programs and honour its commitments for the remainder of this fiscal year. Passage of the Supply Act would

constitute the final approval by this assembly of government and legislative office program spending for the fiscal year that will close at the end of this month.

Up to this point in the current fiscal cycle, temporary spending authority for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015, has been provided through the Interim Appropriation for 2014-2015 Act, 2014. Pending the Legislature’s vote, the enactment of this Supply Act would repeal and replace this short-term legislation. The Supply Act would be deemed to have come into force on April 1, 2014, which was the start of the current fiscal year, and it will be in effect until April 1, 2015, when fiscal 2015-16 actually begins.

Speaker, it is very important to note that the Supply Act does not authorize any new expenditures whatsoever. All expenditures incurred under the Supply Act would be in accordance with the 2014-15 estimates.

The estimates set out a comprehensive account of the government’s intended expenditures for the fiscal year and include details of the spending plans that were presented in our 2014 budget.

To recap, last week the Legislature gave its concurrence to the estimates for fiscal 2014-15. In doing so, it approved the estimates of 10 ministries and offices that were selected for review by the Standing Committee on Estimates. The estimates for ministries that were not called to the standing committee and all legislative offices of the Ontario government received deemed concurrence.

So today, as we near the end of this current fiscal year, we turn our focus to the Supply Act. The Supply Act provides necessary legal spending authority for vital payments made to institutions and individuals, such as hospitals, schools, municipalities and vulnerable people.

I stress again: This is not about approving new spending. It is about providing authority for the government to finance its programs and honour its commitments. I hope the members of this House will join me in supporting Bill 72, the Supply Act.

Now I yield the floor to the member for Etobicoke Centre, whom you’ll have to recognize.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the member from Nipissing.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I said I was sharing.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It doesn’t work like that. It’s a rotational thing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this. When we spoke yesterday for 10 minutes, we talked about all of the various rating agencies and organizations that are very critical of the government of Ontario’s financial position. In fact, I spoke yesterday about the chamber of commerce document entitled How Bad Is It? When you get a document entitled How Bad Is It? you must presume it is pretty bad.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business weighed in; the Bank of Canada weighed in; the Conference Board of Canada—all of these organizations have talked about how this government’s numbers are simply

wrong, but no organization hit home even more than the government themselves did, Speaker. Only four months after passing their budget, they had to come back to the Legislature and confess that they were off by \$500 million. Speaker, in four months, their budget was off by half a billion dollars.

What I wanted to talk about today is: the consequences of debt and deficit here in Ontario and the fact that there is a bill here that wants to go forward. But let's talk about the consequences of not being able to balance your budget.

I'm going to talk specifically at first about my hometown of North Bay and my riding of Nipissing. I'm going to quote from a couple of our local newspaper articles, where Nipissing University had some layoffs this year. In fact, President Mike DeGagné said that round one of the layoffs affected the administration side of the university; they let 16 people go at Nipissing University because this government can't balance their budget. When you wonder about debt and deficit—those aren't very sexy topics, but debt and deficit have very real consequences in each and every one of our homes, and to these 16 people at Nipissing University—and I know all of them. One of them who was there just got her 25-year pin. She's now home.

1540

That was followed by round two at the university. It's 22 professors at Nipissing University who are now gone; 22 professors gone. So here we go, Speaker, with a total of 38 people at Nipissing University gone. This is one university in my hometown.

Let me talk a little bit about the hospital, the front-line workers who are now gone from the North Bay Regional Health Centre. Let's talk about—this is all very recent—the 94 full-time staff at our North Bay Regional Health Centre who are gone: 54 RPNs, 54 nurses, two pharmacy techs, four secretarial staff, two health-record typists, one material management aide, eight ward clerks, two operating-room attendants, nine distribution attendants, three environmental services attendants, one support services worker, one linen worker, one hairdresser—so, Speaker, there's no hairdresser left for the long-term psychiatric patients—one payroll assistant, one switchboard operator, one buyer and one accounts payable clerk. So 94 full-time staff are gone from our hospital.

Also, 34 part-time staff are gone. Over 100 men and women are gone: 14 RPNs, 13 public support workers, two pharmacy techs, two MDRD techs, a support services worker, another hairdresser and a secretary. That's just in North Bay, where we've now got 128 fewer people, front-line health care workers who are no longer working at North Bay Regional Health Centre.

But it didn't just hit my riding and North Bay. The fact is that the cuts are happening in Ontario's hospitals right across the province, and they're devastating. These are front-line health care workers. The depths of the cuts at this point is truly shocking.

In New Liskeard, in the late fall it was made public that the operating room would be closed 50% of the time,

and 18,000 hours per year of nursing care were cut. In Timmins, the hospital is cutting 26 of its remaining beds. That's 16%, or one in every six beds, in Timmins hospital cut, as well as physio and 40 staff positions. We're talking front-line care workers here. In the Soo: 50 hospital beds and 12,500 hours of nursing care in December. We heard that at the pre-budget consultations. In December, all of the remaining beds in the Penetanguishene hospital were cut and closed.

This is what's happening under this Liberal government because they don't know how to balance a cheque-book. They don't know how to control their debt and deficit. They say one thing, but they do the other.

Speaker, we've heard it through the gas plants scandal, we heard it in the MaRS fiasco, we heard it in the Ornge debacle, and we're hearing it in the Sudbury bribery scandal. They say one thing and do the other. They said there would be no changes. But in Georgian Bay General Hospital, which is the amalgamation of Penetanguishene and Midland, 36 complex continuing care rehab and palliative beds were cut. That's 30% of the remaining hospital beds, or one third, being closed down, despite the fact that those hospitals were already at 100% capacity. It sounds a lot like my town of North Bay, where this brand new hospital—we're shutting 60 beds. That's because the Liberal government cannot balance their budget.

These are the consequences in the day-to-day lives of people of cutting front-line health care. In December, a unit at the Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Hospital in Petrolia was closed down. In the fall, the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance—that's Stratford, Seaforth, Clinton and St. Marys—closed 17 beds across the alliance.

Recently we heard the member from Quinte talking about the devastating cuts at Quinte Health Centre. They lost 58 full-time and part-time RNs.

These aren't the only cuts; these are only the cuts that have been announced in the last couple of months, the last two or three months. That's what we're hearing because this government cannot balance their budget.

In the last year, the Scarborough Hospital made public its plans to close 20 surgical beds, two operating rooms, thousands of surgeries, outpatient clinics and tens of thousands of nursing hours. Major cuts are coming—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Member from Newmarket-Aurora, come to order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I know the facts hurt, Speaker, but they're going to hear them.

The cuts at Winchester District Memorial Hospital—cuts happened all across in Renfrew, Perth—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Member from Newmarket-Aurora, second time.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: —Smiths Falls, Arnprior, all across southeastern Ontario. In addition, the Wingham hospital has also faced major cuts.

Speaker, this list can literally go on and on. I know in North Bay, the Near North District School Board had

eight people that they let go. And here we go: 60 beds closed in that hospital—60 beds. My mother was in that hospital two weeks ago, in the aisle for 12 hours waiting to get a room because these clowns are closing 60 beds.

Speaker, this is enough. I can't take any more from these guys.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would ask the member to withdraw.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Withdraw—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you.

Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to stand up to speak to the supply motion. I will note on supply schedule A that we are discussing the expenditures of a little bit over \$87 billion. Schedule B is \$2.3 billion.

The thing that people don't really understand—because we're talking about the money today, which is good; we need to be talking about the money in this House—is that this is an expression of the expenditures that were listed and through the estimates committee. But it all comes back to budget 2014-15, and I think the story of budget 2014-15 is quite astounding.

I think that what happened during the last election, and we have to talk about it a little bit—

Hon. Glen R. Murray: You lost.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, no. Actually, there's an interesting new level of arrogance on that side of the House which is really quite astounding. But the post-election evaluation of this budget—I think the *Globe* and *Mail* editorial from July 14 said it best: "Ontario's Budget: On Second Thought, This Might Hurt." It tells the story of what was really in this budget. It's on page 244, for the new members who didn't have to campaign on that. On page 244, there are 6% cuts in every ministry with the exception of health, the education sector—although there's a note on that, because of course \$500 million is also coming out of that ministry; the post-secondary and training sector, although my experience is the same as the member who spoke formerly. We are seeing cuts in staffing at Wilfrid Laurier and the University of Waterloo; these announcements came out today. We have never seen operational funding at such a low level for post-secondary education in the history of this province. It's coming out of the front-line services.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I understand: You don't want to hear it. Maybe you should go get a coffee or something, but I'm going to talk about the truth. I'm going to talk about what's actually in this budget that you supported and how it's impacting the people of this province. That is our job.

I'll go back to the \$600 million—the Auditor General found \$8.2 billion. We underestimated on the savings that could be found in this province because of pure incompetence on that side of the House—pure incompetence, Mr. Speaker.

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But the *Globe* and *Mail* actually goes on to say—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I don't know; maybe they're interested.

"The confusion comes from the gap—the very wide gap—between the Kathleen Wynne government's rhetoric surrounding the budget, and the actual budget."

What a huge wake-up call it is for the people of this province, because those cuts are playing themselves out. We're seeing it through the estimates, and we're seeing it through the expenditures that are before us today in the House.

"The actual budget, the Liberal government's multi-year spending plan, is an austerity budget." The *Globe* and *Mail* said it best. It is.

In fact, we know that austerity budgets don't work. They don't bring back the economy. They don't serve the people of this province. That story didn't get told during the election, but it is our job in this House to tell that story to the people of this province.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I understand they're very upset.

It's going to be a long three and a half years, don't you think? I sometimes like to quote musical artists just to keep myself engaged. As Mumford and Sons say, you're going to spend the next three and a half years trying to bite your own neck. Until you shift the way that you are spending and investing money in this province, this economy will not recover, because it's going to all the wrong places for all the wrong reasons and will not, with due respect, get this economy back on track.

Just to recap:

—6% cuts in every ministry;

—cuts to health care—the reduction in front-line nursing staff, which we know, through evidence and research, makes a difference in the quality of care;

—cuts to education and schools closing—that discussion paper for education is being travelled around the province. They're looking for \$500 million. Those cuts, obviously, are going to hurt our northern and rural communities the most. The enrolment is not there because the jobs aren't there. It's all connected. The jobs leave, the families leave, the schools close. We know that this is the truth.

The cuts to transportation and the closing of bus stations across the north is a huge issue. It's shameful how northern Ontario is being treated by this government.

Of course, in Kitchener-Waterloo, we're still waiting for that bullet train. I was shopping in the local Zehrs, and a lady came up to me and asked, "When are we going to get that bullet train?" I said, "We're lucky we've got GO service." We've been promised more efficient GO service for almost a decade now. The business community has come to the table with a strong plan for infrastructure investment for the rail. They've made the business case, the economic case, for that improved rail service. Anyway, they are still waiting for the fantastical bullet train. The plan today, which was actually revealed in the newspaper—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Who promised that bullet train, anyway?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's not coming any time soon. Don't hold your breath.

Privatizing public hydro companies: It's astounding that this government is selling off this public asset. We know from history that this isn't a good plan. There's this myth of unlocking value. Really, you're looking for quick money now, and the rest of the province will pay the price down the line. Quite honestly, it's more than discouraging. We should know that privatization of public assets has not served this province well. It has not.

The opening of new corporate tax loopholes that don't create jobs—we know that they don't—but help wealthy companies: It's a news flash here. The banks are doing fine. They're making their money.

This budget obviously fails to address basic principles of tax fairness or consider any modest changes to the corporate tax rate. Even Mr. Regg Cohn put it in his article today: Why isn't this government considering revising the tax regime? He actually cites an increase in corporate taxes—a modest, modest—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I know that you guys won't go for it. The PCs would never vote for anything like that. They're very busy trying to convert themselves into this new cottony, kitteny version of the party. That's where they are right now.

The fact of the matter is, this province needs revenue. You need revenue. I keep going back to the Auditor General's report, which, for some reason, this Liberal government has completely discounted. I carry it around with me because I just need to remind you that she is an independent officer of this Legislature and she has identified some key areas where this government could save money. She has identified huge amounts of waste.

We knew this government was wasting money. We had a number of examples, like Ornge and eHealth, the gas plants, and just the whole entire energy file, actually. It's hard to imagine a more mismanaged ministry than the Ministry of Energy, which underpins almost all of the economic forecasts for the province. You need a strong and progressive energy file if you're going to attract growth, if you're going to ensure that productivity is actually a factor in the economic plan. The expendable income that Ontarians have—all they've seen is their bills going up.

The best, though, is that the 100,000 jobs that Don Drummond said—he was your hand-picked economist. He identified that this budget, the 2014-15 budget, which highlights 6% cuts in every ministry except for these five—although I must admit, though, when you tell hospitals that you're not going to cut and you're just going to leave their base funding as is, that is a cut.

Of course, in education, Hugh Mackenzie put out a report. He has identified—

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, there is more money in education, but it went to new priorities. It went to new pet projects. It went to new little ideas.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Is full-day kindergarten a pet project?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It didn't go to the core base funding of special education and literacy and numeracy.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It certainly didn't go to some auditory benefits of the Minister of Rural Affairs.

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, they don't like hearing it. They don't like hearing it, and that's okay. That's fine.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Oh, yes. Don Drummond said—you would think mainstream media would have picked it up, but when Don Drummond, their hand-picked economist, said, "This budget is going to result in 100,000 fewer jobs in the province of Ontario"—

Interjections.

Ms. Catherine Fife: He said it. It's a matter of public record. You don't want to hear it. It doesn't matter, because we're actually seeing it play itself out. In fact, the entire privatization agenda of this government is undermining public services in the province of Ontario. People are not getting good value for it, and you don't like hearing it. The \$350-million data storage unit outside of Guelph—Mr. Speaker, this is really interesting. Privacy—maintaining our records—is a right. It's actually a right. It's a huge responsibility that the government has to actually ensure that that data is stored safely and correctly and protected.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: And securely.

Ms. Catherine Fife: And securely. So this \$350-million state-of-the-art data storage centre was created. We paid for it. You paid for it; I paid for it; we all did. But it's only at 20% capacity because, somewhere along the line, this government decided that these two consulting companies could better protect our data, at a cost of \$50 million a year.

If you buy a hunting licence, Mr. Speaker, it is stored down somewhere in a private company in Ohio. This government—it was really funny. We sent out the press release about the debenture and the selling off of hydro lines, and somebody sent one back to me and said, "I think this government would like to sell the OPP." They'd sell the OPP if they could, because there are four criminal investigations going on about this government. If they could sell off the OPP, they would do it.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It must be unprecedented.

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's unprecedented. You're making Rob Ford look really good these days, I have to tell you.

1600

Instead of making life more fair, the 2014 budget is plowing ahead with new HST loopholes, just another example of where you could actually be saving money and generating revenue. Budgets are supposed to be moral documents. They are supposed to tell the story of the priorities of a government. That's essentially what they're supposed to do, and they are supposed to tell the people of this province where you're going to be investing money.

You know, 6% reductions in every ministry—I mean, it's right here in your budget, so you can't say it's not true. It is. I distinctly remember—I don't know; maybe you might remember, Mr. Speaker—that when Mike Harris made cuts of 5% in every ministry, they buried him in effigy on the front lawn of Queen's Park. And this government has been framing this budget as a progressive budget. Perhaps we didn't tell that story as well as we should have in the last election. Perhaps we didn't. I should have been just carrying this page, page 244, with me everywhere, and showing it to every person at every single door and saying, "This is the truth about this Liberal budget." It is an austerity budget, pure and simple.

I'd like to go back to the Auditor General's report because, as I pointed out, this supply motion is talking about where we're going to be spending money. We've talked somewhat about where the money is not going, but the people of this province already know where the money isn't going because they're living it. They are living the reality of the 2014-15 budget.

The Auditor General, before Christmas—this is the other thing that I carry around a lot with me these days—made some very good recommendations for this government, which have been almost entirely—it's been the sound of silence from the Minister of Economic Development and Infrastructure. If there was ever a time for this government to take infrastructure funding seriously, it would be now, because they have stated that they are going to spend almost \$130 billion on infrastructure.

I don't know where you're going to get the money. If you do sell off parts of hydro, it's going to be dedicated to infrastructure. We can't get any guarantees that any sale of public assets—which we would never support, because it hasn't worked so far. But we can't get any guarantee that that money is actually going to go into a dedicated fund for infrastructure. Of course, that's a huge red flag for us. You can't blame us for not trusting, because there are enough examples to prove why trust does not exist.

But the Auditor General, of course, has made some very specific recommendations, and I like to read them into the Hansard sometimes just so that the hard work of the auditor's office is actually reflected in the Legislature. As I said, for the most part it has been massively discounted, and so you really do have to question why. Why would a government that is so desperate for revenue be so dismissive, in such an arrogant and irresponsible manner, of the Auditor General, the independent officer of this Legislature?

One of her first recommendations is this: "Infrastructure Ontario should, in conjunction with the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, gather data on actual cost experience from recent public sector infrastructure procurements and alternative financing and procurements and revise its VFM—value-for-money—"assessment methodology to ensure that the valuation of risks assumed to be retained" under both the AFP and public sector delivery models "are well justified." This is a big question.

Interjection.

Ms. Catherine Fife: The minister without portfolio is outraged at this. He's outraged that the Liberal government has turned their back on the basic principles of fiscal responsibility.

Infrastructure Ontario actually wrote a letter in response to this afterwards, and they were like, "We totally don't agree with," blah, blah, blah. But actually in the report, Infrastructure Ontario's response is quite telling. They say that "the absence of comprehensive, formal data for traditionally delivered projects provides an industry-wide challenge in making meaningful comparisons between the delivery models." So they are saying that they have been challenged to make these points, but this debate about infrastructure funding is playing itself out in a couple of key projects right now in the province of Ontario which we can point to, and which we should be paying attention to, quite honestly.

One, of course, is the Hamilton Pan Am stadium—

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Pan/Parapan Am.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Pan/Parapan Am. It was one of those touted P3 projects that was supposed to come in on time—it didn't. It was supposed to come in on budget—it didn't.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It did.

Ms. Catherine Fife: No, if you talk to the subcontractors that just filed a lien against the original French company that's running the project—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: They're not getting paid.

Ms. Catherine Fife: —they're not getting paid. So what really does happen?

Mr. John Yakabuski: The little guy gets crushed.

Ms. Catherine Fife: There's a word for what happens to the little guy which I can't say in the Legislature because I'm just too polite. But that risk transfer gets downloaded to the little guy, and they don't get justice. So there we are. We have an example of a P3 project which is not going too well.

There is, though, the current Spadina subway extension, which has plagued each and every government in the province of Ontario. It really would be hard to find a more mishandled budget, but it's for a whole number of reasons. Namely, I might point to oversight and accountability. But we should be entering a whole new era of financial accountability in this province and in this Legislature, which is one of the reasons that we fought so hard to get the Financial Accountability Officer in place—with the support, of course, of the PC caucus.

So I just want to say that it was really interesting for me to hear that the Premier immediately trumped her best friend, Mr. Tory, and said, "You know what? If this project had been an AFP, this just would not have happened." That's an interesting rationale: to come in so many years after the fact and weigh in on that infrastructure project.

But I just want to offer you a quick comment about Kathleen Wynne's response to the revelation of a reported 15% cost overrun on the Spadina subway. Of course she suggests that the 15% overrun would not have

happened if the project had been procured by P3, but she didn't mention that such price certainty comes at a steep cost, and Ontario's 74 P3 projects have, as already mentioned, cost an additional \$8 billion over the project base cost, equivalent to a 30% cost overrun on every single P3 project. Basically, the Premier of the province of Ontario is suggesting that Toronto should have paid an extra \$800 million to avoid a \$400-million cost overrun. That's not good value for the taxpayers, and of course it makes some good headlines for the Premier.

The most important thing is that there is an imperative for us to figure out where the money is going. I said yesterday that I like following the money. I like following the money because it isn't about ideology. You can't be pigeonholed, stereotyped or typecast because when you follow the money in this province, it is not being invested either in a responsible way or with the proper financial oversight or even with a business plan. If you just look across the street—every day I walk by the MaRS building. There's a big “for lease” sign. You would have thought that before the government got into—I don't even know if there was a contract, but it was—

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a disaster; \$300 million of overspending.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes, but \$256 million to begin with, and no business plan.

I just visited the Child Witness Centre in my riding—and there are some across the province—they have been operating on \$165,000 a year in annual budget since 2006. Yet, across the street, there's no business plan, no strategy and 250-some-odd million dollars, and then they strike a committee to say, “How are we going to make this business viable? How are we going to get our value for this original loan which some people would admit wasn't well thought out?” They strike a panel, they get some big minds and big thinkers, and then those people come back and say, “We need \$86 million more to get that original \$260 million back.” This is—well, it's a little bit insulting; it's insulting and it's not responsible.

1610

If only these decisions were made with at least some foresight. That's why, Mr. Speaker, I'm so proud that we have the Financial Accountability Officer in place. Because the thinking, beside the FAO—which some of the new members might not know—is that there should be a lens applied to all of those contracts. I could argue that that MaRS deal would have not gone through if the Financial Accountability Officer had had a go at that contract and had looked at that business plan and had determined that, if you have no strategy to fill that building, then people—just because you build it doesn't mean they're going to come.

So what we have here, in the province of Ontario, as we discuss the supply motion of some \$87 billion, we are definitely looking at—it all comes back to budget 2014-15. I'll just leave you with this thought, Mr. Speaker. If you have a government that isn't going to listen to the Auditor General of this province and isn't going to do

their due diligence when that independent officer comes forward and highlights inefficiencies, huge inefficiencies—it's kind of demeaning, actually, to call \$8.2 billion “a financial inefficiency”; that's pure incompetence. But on the energy and the smart meters, for instance—I mean, this government is not tracking immunization.

So she comes forward. She brings this report to this House, and all we get is pushback on this. It's astounding. It's astounding to the general population, because they kind of understand that an auditor, who follows the money and highlights serious gaps in rationale and then has the government just ignore it, essentially—that's the definition of an irresponsible government.

There are a lot of things in this province that are at stake around health care and education and climate change and the environment and infrastructure and transit and transportation. This would be a time for this government to signal that, in the three and a half years that we still have left together, they are serious about economic recovery. I would argue that, unless they start listening to the Auditor General, we will not recover, and I would argue that the drag on the economy currently is the Liberal government of Ontario.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the member from—

Mr. Yvan Baker: Etobicoke Centre.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm honoured to speak in the House today in support of Bill 72, the Supply Act for the 2014-15 fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, in this Legislature—and I mentioned this yesterday but I want to reiterate it today—we debate a range of important issues that all of us believe will improve the quality of life of Ontarians and people in our communities. This Supply Act is one of those things that is important because it will ensure that we can continue to invest to support a better quality of life for all Ontarians.

I would like to share with you what I mean. As the deputy government House leader noted, the Supply Act provides the necessary legal and spending authority that ensures we can pay for important priorities like schools, hospitals and transit, and so I urge all members of the Legislature to approve this bill.

I'd like to take a few moments to reflect on the achievements of the past year—I think those are important to talk about—that the Supply Act will allow us to continue to support.

As you know, our government, under the leadership of Premier Wynne, was given a strong four-year mandate by the people of Ontario. We were elected in great part because we made a commitment to take a balanced and thoughtful approach to government. We have a bold plan to build Ontario by focusing on a number of priorities. These include investing in people's talents and skills, building modern infrastructure and transit networks, and creating a dynamic and supportive business environment

on a foundation of fiscal responsibility. We're deeply committed to both protecting and improving the services that matter to people, and also to be fiscally responsible. That's the balanced approach that the people of my riding in Etobicoke Centre asked me to pursue and in my colleagues' ridings on this side of the House, and I'm sure on the opposite side as well.

We're not only going to make sure we're taking a balanced approach, but we're going to make sure that every dollar counts. That's another thing that I heard in my community: "When you go to Queen's Park, please make sure that you make every dollar count and that you get value for taxpayer money." There's no question that the folks on this side of the Legislature—and I work closely with Minister Matthews of the Treasury Board, who is working very hard to make sure that happens. But I know that's the case for all ministers in our government.

Now, we have a goal to eliminate the deficit by 2017-18. I can tell you that we're well on our way to accomplishing that goal. The member opposite will be glad to hear that. As the finance minister clearly laid out in the fall economic statement, the government is focusing on four strategies to get us back to a balanced budget. I'd like to reiterate those because I think they are important pillars of how we're doing that.

The first point is that we're going to ensure that everyone pays their fair share of taxes. This means tackling the underground economy, corporate tax avoidance and contraband tobacco. This is just a matter of fairness. This is just making sure that the taxes that are on the books today—that everyone pays their fair share. That's the first thing.

The second point is that we're going to work to maximize the value of government assets and use the funds to build the new generation of public infrastructure. So we're not just talking about investments for today, but we're talking about the investments that are needed for tomorrow to build up our economy and to improve our quality of life.

As someone who has worked in business in my prior life, I can say that this practice of looking at assets, of looking at the—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I do appreciate quietness to give the member the opportunity to debate. I would encourage members on both sides not to have conversations across the legislative floor while we do in fact have a member engaging in debate. Please continue.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Speaker; I appreciate that.

Let me just go back: The finance minister laid out four points in the fall economic statement that will lead us to a balanced budget.

The first point is that we're going to make sure that everyone pays their fair share of taxes. That's an issue of fairness, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying, we're going to maximize the value of government assets that the people of Ontario, through

governments of the past and the government of the present, have invested in. As I was saying, as someone with a finance background, a business background, that is just good practice. That's a good way of making sure that we're getting good value for taxpayer money and delivering the best possible outcomes, not just in the present but also into the future.

The third point is that we're going to work to restrain compensation growth in the public sector.

The fourth point is something that I'm very excited about, which is the Program Review, Renewal and Transformation. I know there are a number of members of the Treasury Board here who have been involved in that. I know all the ministries have been involved in that. Everyone is working hard on this. It's a fundamentally new and important approach to multi-year planning and budgeting. It involves taking a line-by-line approach to look through every ministry's budget and to look at the programs and services that it delivers. The program review will manage spending, first of all, by using fresh eyes to take stock of every government program and service in order to determine: Is it still relevant? Is it effective? Is it efficient? And is it sustainable? The review is about finding new and smarter ways of doing things to improve outcomes and to deliver for the people of Ontario the best value for their taxpayers' dollars.

The member for Nipissing was speaking earlier about job losses in his community, and I am very sympathetic to those folks who have lost their jobs. But I can just tell you, Mr. Speaker, that he ran on a platform to cut 100,000 jobs, and that's not the approach we're taking. We're going to move forward with more opportunities that improve efficiency, reduce overlap across government programs and ensure that the government works better for Ontarians.

We will make tough choices about programs and services that are not performing, do not link to government priorities or no longer serve a clear public interest.

At the same time, we will ensure that we create jobs, expand opportunity and invest in priorities like health, education and infrastructure. I think these are all the right places to be investing our taxpayers' dollars.

Then we're going to look across ministries. We're going to look to see if we can achieve better outcomes, better value for money, if we pooled resources or simplified access. Getting back to balance is not an end in itself. I want to emphasize that. Getting back to balance is not an end in itself, but it's a means to an end.

The real goal is that the programs and services that Ontarians rely on will be there when we need them and when the people of Ontario need them.

1620

I would just like to give an example of what I'm talking about. An example of the transformation that's already under way is our five-year Poverty Reduction Strategy, Realizing Our Potential, especially as it relates to homelessness. At one time, Ontario had two separate ministries and five different program areas addressing homelessness. There were rigid rules and a complex

administration. We created one program, the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, administered by one ministry. This helped us put money where it is really needed, increasing funding by \$42 million—

Mr. Chris Ballard: Increasing funding.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Increasing funding. Let me repeat that, just so it's clear: increasing funding by \$42 million to a total of \$294 million.

Other strategic investments geared to reducing poverty have also occurred across government including health, education and housing programs.

Mr. Speaker, since launching our first Poverty Reduction Strategy in 2008, 47,000 children and their families were lifted out of poverty, and many others were prevented from falling into poverty in the last six years.

Interjections.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'd ask the members opposite to listen to what I have to say because these are relevant figures.

To help low-wage workers, the government has, again, raised the minimum wage to the highest of any province, \$11 per hour, and has indexed increases for the future.

This year alone, we are investing more than \$1 billion in the Ontario Child Benefit, something that's benefiting children across Ontario and benefiting children in my community.

We'll allocate \$16 million over three years to create about a thousand new supportive housing spaces and related supports to help Ontarians living with mental health issues and addictions.

We'll provide health benefits for children and youth in low-income families to ensure they have access to services not covered by publicly funded health care, such as prescription drugs, vision care and mental health services.

And there is much, much more.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that while we've been making these investments in our priorities, we've also managed to hold average growth in program spending to 1.2%, which is well below inflation, without cutting services that people in Ontario rely on. Going forward, program spending is projected to grow at an annual rate of 0.8% through 2017-18.

We are investing in the services that the people of my community and, I know, the people of all our communities are concerned about. We're investing in health care, education and infrastructure. These are not all the wrong places; these are all the right places.

We are taking a fiscally responsible approach to balancing the budget and to managing taxpayers' dollars, and we're delivering on our promise to Ontarians. We're protecting and improving the services that matter, and we're being fiscally responsible and making every dollar count. I'm proud to be part of a government that's working very, very hard to do all those things.

I started by saying that we're all here to improve the quality of life of people in communities across our province, and I'd like to reiterate an important point: that the introduction of the Supply Act is part of the government's economic plan to build Ontario up, to

create jobs and to secure our shared prosperity, and therefore, the Supply Act is a fundamental step in doing just that.

The government's plan, as I've outlined, is comprehensive and focuses on Ontario's greatest strengths: our people and our partnerships.

I urge all members of the Legislature to support this act. Without the spending authority that the Supply Act would provide, the government would be unable to meet its obligations to the people of this province and continue the important work before us, for the benefit of the constituents of my community in Etobicoke Centre and for the benefit of the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, it's my pleasure to speak to Bill 72.

First, I'm going to ask the government to—I think they may have made an error in Bill 72, and I'd like to draw it to their attention. I've gone through all the schedules, A, B and C, and there are three very important ministries that are missing in this Bill 72: the ministry of wastefulness, the ministry of mismanagement, and the ministry of wrongdoing and skulduggery. If those ministries had been included, then we might have a more complete picture of how this government spends its money—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): On a point of order, I recognize the member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Speaker, the member may not make an allegation against an individual or use language which is calculated to cause disorder. I suspect both of those are either in his statements or part of his motive, and I ask the Speaker to enforce those two standing orders: standing order 23(b)(i) and standing orders 23(h) and (i).

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member for that. I would remind the member from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington to refrain from dialogue that may not perhaps be parliamentary. Thank you.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you very much, Speaker, for that reminder.

Ontario has become well known as a province that is continually mired in scandals and financial mismanagement: everything from small, little wastes from expensive consultants at eHealth or the Pan Am Games expensing doughnuts and coffee and dry cleaning to the bigger wastefulness such as MaRS and the gas plants and the billions for Ornge helicopters.

Today, the government is seeking concurrence on budget expenditures for \$127 billion, which, of course, includes all those billions of dollars of waste and mismanagement identified by both the official opposition and, of course, the Auditor General, such as the \$2-billion wastefulness on the smart meter program and the extra \$50 billion that Ontario hydro users have had to pay for on their hydro bills.

Speaker, I don't know how anyone in good conscience can vote in favour of this supply bill to grant this government authority to continually waste taxpayers' money with such abandon and in such a cavalier disregard for taxpayers and for any sense of value.

Yesterday, I spoke in this House regarding the interim supply motion, which would grant the government spending authorities for the first half of the next fiscal year without oversight and transparency. At that time, I spoke about the processes that are in place here in Ontario which actually allow, permit and incent the government to spend unwisely and have wastefulness as an invariable and inevitable outcome, when you don't have proper checks and balances. Unlike all other provinces, this Legislature actually prevents its members from doing our job in a diligent, dutiful and responsible fashion.

As I said yesterday, and I'm going to reiterate today, Ontario is the only Canadian Legislative Assembly that both limits the amount of ministries that the estimates committee may call and examine, and also simultaneously passes all other ministry expenses without review by any other body of the Legislative Assembly. We're the only ones. Every other Legislative Assembly in Confederation has a two-step process in their estimates. Those ministries that are not examined by estimates are then referred to either a Committee of the Whole or a subcommittee called the Committee of Supply. We don't do that here. That's one of the big reasons why we have such problems.

I see the Minister of Tourism here. He'll recall how, during estimates, we asked and examined about all the agencies under his authority that did not have their annual reports filed, that did not have their expense claims filed—all statutory and mandatory obligations of the ministry, but they had not got them done. To this day, many of them still remain outstanding and not done. Speaker, how can we expect otherwise when we treat the rules of this House with such disregard for checks and balances?

We examined six out of 27 ministries—that's all: six out of 27 ministries—and all others were deemed to be passed. That's what ends up in this supply bill: all those expenditures, \$127 billion, without proper oversight, without any examination.

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Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, come to order, please.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Newfoundland, like I said, moves estimates not examined by the estimates committee to the Committee of the Whole on supply.

Nova Scotia: All ministries not examined by the estimates committee are sent over to Committee of the Whole and then to the subcommittee on supply, whereas 56% of our ministries get off without any review whatsoever.

We have the largest budget of any province in Confederation and we have the most minimal oversight over our budgetary processes. Are we mired in scandal and waste-

fulness for a reason? We are. This Legislature doesn't do its job. We're prevented from doing it.

Unlike Ontario, Alberta has no limits on the amount of ministries and agencies that can be called before their estimates. This year, they brought forward 15. We brought forward six. Alberta has no set time limit for consideration of the estimates. Here, by the middle of November, any ministry not considered by estimates is deemed to be passed. We're tying the hands of legislators and preventing legislators from actually doing their job.

Saskatchewan is another one. It has no limit on the amount of ministries or agencies that can be called to the estimates committee. It just goes on and on.

I see there are a number of ministers here in the chamber this afternoon. I would ask that you actually take a look at the standing orders of other assemblies across this country. Do a comparison and see how other assemblies operate. Look at their standing orders and see what we are doing wrong here and what the other provinces are doing better. And then ask yourselves, "Is this the reason why we have such condemning reports by our Auditor General each and every year, why we have continuous scandals raised in this House every week?" There's a reason for it and the reason is right in front of their faces. It's in the standing orders.

We can go through and through. I also want to say, if this government took its responsibilities seriously—when they recalled the House back in July, when this chamber came back in July after the election, and passed a budget, the estimates committee was allowed to resume sitting September 30. But before that, they had introduced and debated a multitude of bills. About 10 different bills were introduced in July by this government. The whole time, none of the estimates were provided or tabled for people to examine or investigate.

If they're serious, why would they bring forward all those bills last summer but withhold the main estimates until the end of September and then only give us to the middle of November to examine them? Was it purposeful? Was it incompetence? Was it a disregard, a cavalier attitude? I'm not sure what it is, but what I am sure of is the standing orders allowed them to do that and they did it. They did it and they didn't care what the results were. They didn't care about the waste and the mismanagement.

Speaker, I would seek unanimous consent that those three ministries be included in Bill 72: the ministry of wastefulness, the ministry of wrongdoing and the ministry of inefficiencies. Could I have unanimous consent on that, Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? The member from Niagara—

Mr. Randy Hillier: Speaker, on a point of order: I call for unanimous consent that we include the three ministries.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Please sit down.

I properly recognize the member from Niagara Falls. Further debate.

Applause.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's a little scary when everybody's clapping before you start speaking.

Mr. Speaker, I was here yesterday when we talked about the supply motion. I've listened very carefully to all my colleagues, and I listened to my colleague from the Liberal Party who said there haven't been cuts to health care. I want to be clear to my friends: In my riding, there have been lots of cuts to health care. The Niagara-on-the Lake hospital is scheduled to close. The Welland hospital is scheduled to close. These are cuts.

But the one that's really interesting to me, as we celebrated International Women's Day yesterday in Niagara Falls—to my colleagues who are listening—is that you go on a honeymoon to Niagara Falls. Do you know why you go to Niagara Falls? You go to Niagara Falls to make babies. Yet because of the cuts to maternity, you can no longer have babies in Niagara Falls, which makes absolutely no sense to me.

That shows there have been cuts to health care, and I want my colleagues to understand that. I wanted to raise those because in our riding, in the Niagara area, we've had lots of cuts to health care.

Earlier today, I had the privilege of meeting with the chamber from Samia, a group of six individuals. Some had small businesses, some were family-owned businesses and some were bigger corporations. What they told me very clearly—and something that I believe we all have to find a solution to—is the cost of hydro. I firmly believe that if you're going to lower the cost of hydro, you can't privatize it because they're going to want to take a profit out of it and rates are going to go up. We've seen that in the province of Ontario. If you're going to drive business away from Ontario—hydro rates have to get under control or they're not coming here. They're not going to invest. They're not going to invest in the plants that we need.

I listened to my good friend from the Niagara region, from St. Catharines. I heard him mention General Motors. I talked about that yesterday when I stood up and talked, and I disagree. The union that represents those workers, I know, has met with the Liberal government more than once. Unifor now represents them. It's a new name; it used to be the CAW. They were very clear that they felt the Ontario government should keep the shares so at least they're at the table when they're looking at investment because we have lots of concerns in the auto industry.

In my riding, I obviously have concerns around the St. Catharines plant. As I said the other day here, we still have, in the St. Catharines plant, 2,500 employees. If you take a look at the auto sector—and you can argue this one way or the other—it creates spinoff jobs, somewhere between seven and 10 other jobs in the auto sector. That's very key for my riding. That means you're now talking 10,000 and 12,000 jobs. These jobs are normally good-paying jobs, some with pensions. Some of the parts manufacturers don't have pensions, but they're getting paid a fair wage with some benefits.

You take a look at Oshawa. I want everybody on that side—because a lot of the Liberal MPPs are from Toron-

to or from the Oshawa area. The Oshawa plant needs investment. They need the government to sit with all the partners. They need the government to sit with the company. They need them to sit with the union and they have to come up with a solution to the auto sector in the province of Ontario—just like we missed out on the investment in Windsor at the Ford plant.

That's why it was important when the union was saying to the Liberal government, "Don't sell the shares. Be at the table. Be able to negotiate with them." We've got lots of concerns around the Oshawa and St. Catharines facilities.

Now, it looks like the CAMI facility in Ingersoll, with the investment they just got, may be in a little better shape. That's why I wanted to raise that.

I want to talk about some of the other stuff that's gone on in my riding that I think—and I might be wrong on this, but you can help me with this—will help balance the budget. That's what we're saying we're going to do by 2017. I listened to the member from across the way talk about poverty reduction. The reality in the province of Ontario since 2009 is that, unfortunately, poverty is going up. Some of that is because of the types of jobs that are out there. Some of that might have been caused by the economic downturn, but the reality is, poverty is going up in the province of Ontario, and we've got to do everything we can.

How do you fix poverty in the province of Ontario? Anybody know? You put people back to work. I'm saying to the agriculture minister, who I talked to earlier today, in Fort Erie, where we have some real challenges around employment: How do we make sure that the town of Fort Erie is going to have an opportunity to keep people working until maybe we get the new marina up and going, maybe the new speedway up and going and really get some energy around that community?

1640

Well, one of the ways that we can do it—because it has been there for over 100 years—is to continue to make sure we support the Fort Erie Race Track. Now, there was a bad decision made a few years ago on getting rid of the slots, and there's a number of reasons around that and how that happened. They thought there was going to be a mega-casino down in Toronto. I believe it was Paul Godfrey who headed up that. He's no longer there. Unfortunately, our slots are gone with him.

What we need is for some form of gaming to come back into Fort Erie.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I was down in Fort Erie.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Yes, you have been down there.

We are working extremely hard. We have new owners down there. But I'm talking about putting people to work, making sure that those 1,000 people who work there—and if we have some form of gaming, that's another 225 jobs. You know what they're going to do when they have jobs? One, they're going to be able to support their family. They're going to support the small businesses in the community. But just as important, they're going to pay taxes. As more people pay taxes,

that helps to run the province and pay for schooling, pay for health care.

I'm looking at a solution in Fort Erie that's already there. There's not a lot of cost to the government. They're just saying, "Let's put it back." The building is there. The machines, where the slots are, I think they're still there. Let's just get it back up and running and get full racing at the Fort Erie Race Track.

I was really pleased last night. I got a call last night around 11 o'clock to say that the town of Fort Erie, the council, has agreed to help and pay \$500,000 in tax dollars to keep the Fort Erie Race Track going. That's important. But here's some of the problem with that and some of the concern that some of the residents have: We are the only community, the only town, that's paying that kind of money back into the racetrack, whereas all the other ones don't do that because they have slots. So if we bring the slots back, we can take that \$500,000 and spend it where it probably—it could be in infrastructure. It could be in all of the things that we should be doing in the town—fixing the sewers; all those type of things.

I think the Fort Erie Race Track is a winner. I know, and I can say this, that the agriculture minister has been down to Fort Erie. We've increased the race days this year from 37 to 40. When I say that, it gives the people that work at that racetrack—it doesn't sound like a lot to some people here—four more days of working, four more days of paycheques. We believe that racetrack could easily run somewhere between 77 and 82 dates, and we're hoping that the government is listening and they hear that and they see the benefit it would be to the province of Ontario.

On the hospitals—and I've talked about this for a long, long time. With no disrespect to anybody—we all have our opinions on how we should fund hospitals—I believe that the way to fund hospitals is the same way we've done it for a long, long time, and that's having them publicly funded and publicly delivered. I'm going to give you an example because I think it's important. It's one thing to stand up here and say, "This is what you should do," but you've got to have some kind of—

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Evidence.

Mr. Wayne Gates:—evidence to prove that it does work.

I'm going to talk about a hospital in Peterborough. They had a hospital very similar to the new hospital in St. Catharines. The difference is about 25 beds. But here's the big difference: The hospital in Peterborough—where you're from—was built for \$340 million. I might be out by a couple of million dollars, but it's certainly in that range. The one in St. Catharines was \$1 billion.

Now, we can argue and disagree on whether you agree it was P3 or not, but that shows that for a publicly funded hospital, where the government can borrow the money at a much cheaper rate, we can build it cheaper.

So in the St. Catharines situation—and this is what we have in Niagara, and I have this debate with my good friend: that in our area we could have taken that \$600-million difference between what it cost in Peterborough and what it cost in St. Catharines and reinvested it back

into front-line workers, reinvested it back into our hospitals in Niagara Falls, reinvested it into the hospital in Niagara-on-the-Lake. That, to me, makes sense; and that's the argument that I've put forward around that.

On the Niagara Falls hospital, we're looking at a new hospital there, but we're looking at it eight to 10 years away. This isn't something that's going to happen tomorrow. It was announced a year ago, but it's not there.

I really believe we need a debate on how we're going to fund hospitals. Are we going to P3, publicly deliver it, and take that money that we'd normally be giving to some kind of company and reinvest it back into our community? I believe that's the smart way, and I'm not the only one saying it. The Attorney General said the same thing. We spent \$8.2 billion on P3s that we could have spent in the province. So it's not me saying it; there are other people.

I think we need the debate. We can have the debate, and we can figure out where we go, but we need the debate. In my area, we haven't had the debate yet, and I think we need that debate.

I want to talk about the Hamilton stadium, because that's in the news too. It's good to see that the minister is here. I got lucky this afternoon. A lot of the ministers are here participating in this very important debate. I'm hoping the minister will pay attention and listen to this.

Here's the problem that I saw with the Hamilton stadium—and I'm not saying I'm right, but this is what I think the problem was. Take a look at the Hamilton stadium where the Hamilton Ticats are going to be, where they're going to have the soccer for the Pan Am Games. That's a good thing. The Ticats are playing in a new stadium; I think that's a good thing. The Pan Am Games are going to be in Hamilton. The soccer is probably going to be one of the most watched sports. I think they'll play to a lot of sold-out stadiums. Again, that's a good thing.

Here's the problem with what has transpired in Hamilton with the timing of it: Instead of giving the building of that stadium to a company from the province of Ontario when we had people out of work, we gave it to a company in Spain. I think that's a mistake. As it showed up that they're not paying workers, not paying the subcontractors, I think that's an issue that we should address. We should make sure, if we're going to use tax dollars to run the Pan Am Games right across the province of Ontario—I think in the spirit of wanting to do it, we should be putting as many people who live in the province of Ontario to work, as many businesses, whether they're small, medium or large, to work—I think that's the key.

Again, when we're talking about the budget and how we want to get it paid, how do you pay the budget? I don't think it's rocket science here. If you put people to work, they pay taxes, they buy goods at the corner store, and they go to department stores locally. It's all going back into the local economy. When you give the work to a company that's from Europe, they take the money that you're paying them and take it out of your province, out of your country. I don't think that's the right way to go.

I know there's a couple of other people who would like to talk on this, but I do want to talk about a school down in Niagara-on-the-Lake real quick: Parliament Oak school. In the budget, you have \$750 million on closing schools. You call it amalgamating them and all that kind of stuff, but the reality is \$750 million to close schools. What I'm saying to the government is, let's take a look at how we can keep them open. Let's put a fund together on how we can keep schools open and use them as community hubs. The rural schools are really struggling when you close their school because now there's no school in their community. Young kids have to get out of bed at 6:30 to catch a bus to do all that stuff. There is a parent group that is fighting the closure of Parliament Oak.

I believe that this government should take a look at what we can do to keep schools open and make them community hubs. As you know, and we've seen this where they had to reopen a few years later because more people moved into this area, if you want to have young people move into Niagara-on-the-Lake, if you want to make sure that your schools are going to be full, you've got to make sure they're still there. In Parliament Oak, you can have the school open, and if you have to use other things, use them as a community hub. I encourage this government to take a look at that as well.

I appreciate your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It was a great pleasure to listen to the members in both opposition parties.

Listening to the member from Nipissing was most entertaining, because the investments in North Bay have resulted in the new Mike Harris library at Nipissing University, which was built by the Liberal government in a spirit of generosity, and a brand new hospital and seniors' home, which I've visited many times. The health care capacity and new facilities and investments in the city of North Bay are unprecedented.

As a matter of fact, for a party that ran on cutting 100,000 jobs to stand up and read a list of hairstylists and nurses that were being laid off, which is a complete fiction, Mr. Speaker, just has an incredible amount of enigmatic contradictions to it in the sense that you're standing here, you wanted to lay off 100,000 more people than we would ever imagine doing, and you're complaining about cuts in a municipality like North Bay, which has never seen greater investments.

Mr. Speaker, as you may know if you pay attention to the new way in which hospitals and schools are designed, we spend a lot of money up front in design reducing the amount of travel time and non-service time for nurses and doctors. We have won international awards, and the member for Cambridge knows that because she was a nurse who worked in one of those hospitals. Actually, my partner, Rick, is an operating room nurse who has worked in other provinces.

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There is no province in Canada right now, quite frankly, which better designs hospitals to reduce the amount of administrative overhead and non-productive

time for health care workers. So yes, we are freeing up time, which is exactly what the opposition said that we should do.

If we're not designing hospitals to actually make life easier and healthier for health care workers and providers and have the physical plan of those hospitals support more contact time with patients through innovation and getting savings—now you've mistakenly called that "cuts." But maybe someone can explain the difference to the members of the opposition between cuts and innovation, because my partner, when he worked in Manitoba, worked an average of 70 or 80 hours; he works 30 or 40 hours at most now. Actually, given that he does neurosurgery, which is brains and spines—you want those people to be well rested.

The other piece that's surprising to me is this whine from the official opposition about how Liberals don't care about rural Ontario. In any part of the province right now—the member for Peterborough has made this observation many, many times before—we are spending more in every community on infrastructure: on roads, on sewers, on schools—over 100 new schools. There is not a rural community in Ontario that isn't seeing 500% to 1,000 times more dollars invested. If you want those in absolute terms, every year that the Conservatives were in power post-1995, they spent between \$2 billion and \$3 billion on infrastructure. Today we are spending \$15 billion a year on infrastructure. The last Premier of Ontario who actually had that level of spending, in today's dollars, was Premier Robarts. You have to go back to Premier Robarts to get the level of spending across Ontario on infrastructure.

So when people in the third party call this an austerity budget, I find that completely laughable. When your infrastructure investments in transit, in the electrification of GO—and yes, you're actually going to see plans and the initial work that was done on things like high-speed rail. You're going to see electrification. But it takes a lot of work and planning to go from a province that was spending almost nothing on transit and roads to one that is investing at an unprecedented level.

The third party, also, I find particularly entertaining because there isn't an idea to get back to balance that they like. I listen very carefully every day in the House and I say, "What is the NDP saying to us about how we get back to balance?" Well, it's raise corporate taxes—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Well, they're not asking any questions.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: They're not asking any questions about very much these days—but it's interesting: How would you get back to balance? It's interesting because we had two NDP governments in Canada—we can learn some lessons from this. We had Nova Scotia, where they increased the sales tax by 2%—that didn't make them very popular, which is why there's a Liberal government in Nova Scotia right now—and they increased the tax burden by raising consumption taxes on all the things that middle-class and poor families actually have to spend more money on. So the entire

creativity of the NDP, when they actually have an entire public service in a mid-sized province—the only solution they had to get back to balance was to raise sales taxes.

Now, Mr. Speaker, can you imagine the howling that we would hear from the third party if we raised sales taxes?

The most exciting electoral politics right now are going on in Manitoba, but not in a general election. The NDP is so talented that they managed to make the most exciting electoral show in Canada—

Mr. Arthur Potts: Internally.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: —internally, within one of their party, where their Premier hung on with such confidence by the core of the party that he won by 33 votes, and what did they do—I'll wrap up, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry; I'll wrap up. I'll simply say this: What was the imaginative solution to balancing the budget in Manitoba? Raising sales taxes again.

I'm going to say that maybe three is the charm. The NDP love to carp on taking equity positions in public utilities. All of that is terribly ideologically awful for them, but raising sales taxes on working families is the only solution they can come up with.

I don't think we have too many lessons to take from the third party, who actually wanted to reduce budget spending \$600 million less than we were proposing to do, which sounds a tad right-wing populist to me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please. Thank you.

I beg to inform the House that I have today laid upon the table the post-event report of the 2014 general election from the Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario, sessional paper number 221, tabled on March 10, 2015.

Further debate? I recognize the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was surprised that the Minister of the Environment sat down so quickly; I guess he had nothing left to say. I could have used a little time myself to clear my congestion here, but I'm good to go.

I was hoping I was going to have some time to speak to a few bills this week, but it seems that the government is up to their old shenanigans on that.

I do want to talk about Bill 72 here, the Supply Act. This government—in some ways I sympathize with them. They've got a real challenge ahead of them trying to balance the books of this province and turn the deficit into a surplus so that we can start chipping away at that massive debt. I have some sympathy, but then when I start to think logically about it, I forget about that sympathy because you see, Speaker, all of the problems that they've got with debt and deficit are of their own making. They've more than doubled the debt since they've come to power. They spend money with no regard.

We warned them years ago: "If you don't get a handle on how to manage the finances of this province, you're going to find yourself up against the wall before too long." That's exactly where they find themselves now.

You see, the Premier went around Ontario in the election of last June, throughout May and June, and talked about how she was not going to cut front-line health care. But now, when the proverbial stuff hits the fan, as they say, that's exactly what she's doing. She is cutting health care to people across Ontario. And it's happening all across Ontario. It's happening in my riding.

I sympathize with the hospitals that are left with the job of making the decisions of where they're going to make the cuts, because they're just told by the Premier and those people up in that corner office, "You're going to have to make cuts."

But what just irks me to no end is how they travelled around the province—in my riding too—and promised that there would be no cuts to health care, that there would be no cuts to front-line services; it wasn't going to happen. And they demonized my party because we told people there were going to be changes; there were going to have to be some tough decisions made.

And now the people are finding that—wow, I wonder how many times the folks on the other side are having a cordial cup of coffee with Smokey Thomas these days? It's not happening. It's not happening. Because you see—and I'm not here to defend Smokey Thomas or his labour group; I mean, I've never had a cup of coffee with Smokey either. But I'll tell you, he probably is justified in feeling betrayed by the government because they told him one thing and now they're doing something else.

Smokey Thomas is never going to say, "John Yakabuski betrayed me," because I've never seen him at one of my fundraisers. I've never seen any money from any of his people to help support my campaign because he realizes that we're not on the same side all the time. I do support the rights of workers, but more than anything, what I support is being straight with people, giving them the straight goods.

Pardon me, Mr. Speaker. I have to keep my throat wet.

The reason they're faced with these challenges today is because of their mismanagement of yesterday. Let's just see some of the things that they've been up to: \$300 million plus at MaRS. How many of those front-line workers would still be on the job if we hadn't put that money into MaRS? It's a real scandal.

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Some \$2 billion at eHealth, a billion dollars on the Ornge scandal—and now they've got those helicopters that were never the right ones in the first place; they're trying to sell them—\$1.1 billion on the gas plants.

My friend from Niagara Falls was talking about General Motors. When they recently sold those shares that they bought at the time of the recession, they lost \$600 million on the sale of those shares. Why did they sell them? Because they need that money in this fiscal year, because they're already further behind the eight ball than they anticipated.

Somehow they have this pipe dream that you can spend, spend, spend and all of a sudden you can just turn this thing around 180 degrees and you'll balance the budget without really inflicting any pain. But that is

exactly what they're doing: They're inflicting a tremendous amount of pain on people because of the mismanagement of the past.

The chickens always come home to roost, Mr. Speaker. That's an old saying, but it's very, very true. You reap what you sow. That's another one. For many years, this government was sowing the seeds of excess and largesse and extravagance and trying to convince the people of Ontario that we could spend our way out of anything, and now we're up against it. We're up against it.

This government is not off to a good start at all in this session. They're now faced with their fourth—their fourth—OPP investigation. Yesterday, there were some revelations that the RCMP raided the offices of the Ontario Provincial Police Association union and have begun a police investigation into activities in that organization. But what is completely different from what's happening here with the Premier and her deputy chief of staff, Pat Sorbara, and her chief bagman up in Sudbury, Gerry Loughheed? The members of the OPPA voluntarily stepped aside until this investigation can be completed. One member was asked to step aside by the board. But, in this case, the Premier continues to defend Pat Sorbara, who was caught on tape offering inducements to Andrew Olivier so that he would not receive the nomination in the riding of Sudbury.

I wouldn't accuse anyone in this House—and under the standing orders, I can't—but I do know this one thing for sure, Speaker: The tapes don't lie. There is no 20-minute gap in these tapes. There is no Watergate gap. There's no splicing. They've been shown in their entirety.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please.

I'd just like to remind the Legislature right now that any warnings that may have occurred in the morning session still continue in the afternoon session. Those who may have been warned are very much aware of that. I'm just serving it as a reminder. I would ask again that we allow fair debate. I would like the member to be able to be heard, as I would like with any of the other parties. Again, I thank you for your indulgence.

I turn it back to the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke for further debate.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would hate to see the honourable member on the other side be not only without a portfolio but without a place in the House today.

I want to talk a little bit about smart meters. There's another billion-dollar fiasco. The Auditor General herself has said that their cost went from \$1 billion to \$1.9 billion. That's shameful. Those are the kinds of things that are hurting people on their hydro bills. Hydro is one of the biggest issues for people in my riding. The global adjustment is all part of this Green Energy Act, this crazy idea that you can pay people substantially more than a product is worth and at the end of the day it would somehow make financial sense. Markets don't work that way.

They signed all kinds of crazy deals to pay people way beyond the value of the product they were producing and the energy they were producing, and now we are paying that through our energy rates. Poor seniors and small businesses are paying that through their energy rates, and through 2015 that will have cost the energy ratepayers of Ontario \$50 billion. That's not "million," I say to my friend from Northumberland—Quinte West. That's not \$50 million; that's \$50 billion.

Speaker, I'm just about out of time and my voice is just about done, which I'm sure will make some of the people on the other side very, very happy. I am going to pass this on now to the other speakers. But my God, if you want to talk about what this government is doing wrong, two hours of debate is simply not enough. We need about two months and then we might actually start to scratch the surface.

They've got to change their ways or this province is in big trouble—big trouble. You've got to start to think about the future, the children, the grandchildren and what kind of Ontario you're going to leave for them.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'm delighted to have the opportunity to get a few words on the record this afternoon during debate on supply.

It's interesting when I hear from the official opposition and the third party the doom-and-gloom message. That's just not reality in Ontario today. The Conference Board of Canada just recently released a study, and they're a very thorough group. They do detailed economic analysis; they look at trends. Their conclusion was that Ontario will grow in 2015 about 3%, almost 3%—2.9%—and that Ontario will lead the nation again in growth.

Just let me highlight what's going on. Just recently Chrysler Canada announced that there's going to be a \$2-billion investment in their Windsor operation. Let me tell you, just last June, Karan and I traded our 2005 Grand Caravan and we bought a 2014 Grand Caravan from J.J. Stewart Chrysler in Norwood, Ontario, one of the largest Chrysler dealers in my part of Ontario. The 2014 van is a gem, with all that new Chrysler technology.

I want to acknowledge that great van. Lou Rinaldi's son is one of the leading engineers with Chrysler Canada. He designs a lot of the air conditioning systems for Chrysler North America and their products they send to Europe. Here in Ontario, we invest in ingenuity and innovation, and Mr. Rinaldi's son represents that generation of new innovators in the province of Ontario.

Let me tell you, I was very sad the other day when the opposition decided to stall Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act. We haven't renewed agriculture insurance in Ontario since 1996. In every back concession—and I travel on a lot of back concessions these days, Mr. Speaker—I chat with people at their kitchen tables. What is their message to me? "Mr. Leal, get Bill 40 passed."

I was upset that this is being stalled. I want to get it to committee, I want to get it on the road and I want it to get

royal assent to help our commodity groups right here in the province of Ontario.

It's interesting: I want to just—I must have a reference point here. Let me look at this. Here is an article from the *Toronto Star*, January 28, 2015. It talks about the key plank in the Tory platform last spring—you know, the 100,000 jobs cut. But this is interesting. The Tories all of a sudden have the Sergeant Schultz approach to this: Hear no evil. Speak no evil. See no evil. "I hear nothing. I know nothing. I said nothing." But interestingly enough, the member from—where is he from? The member from Lambton—Kent—Middlesex. Now, he provided the media in Ontario interesting insight. He said—"The documents, which were distributed to caucus members in a closed meeting, then collected by Hudak's staff"—almost like CSIS working there—"mention a proposal to 'decrease the government payroll by 100,000' by contracting out 'many of these jobs ... to the private sector.'"

"In the notation on his copy, McNaughton wrote the 100,000 figure was 'bold, specific, great!'" Now, that's interesting.

Everybody else who was at the meeting, including the member from Whitby—Ajax—"I at no time knew about the 100,000 job cuts ... it came with no warning," she reiterated in an interview Tuesday. "I'm really disappointed Patrick"—referring to downtown Patrick Brown, our next leader—

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Excuse me, sir.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): It's all right, Minister. I would just remind you of the bill we're talking about, and I would ask that your references pertain specifically to that particular bill and that anything that may be on the peripheral or even beyond the peripheral not be included in your remarks for debate.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Thank you. I'm sorry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I apologize, Mr. Speaker. I didn't mean to digress there a minute, but it's always interesting when I hear people try to rewrite history, and I get really concerned when people try to rewrite history, so I just wanted to correct the facts today. I know you're interested.

Another thing that's of interest to me is, there has been a lot of talk about Sudbury here and the Sudbury by-election. I note that with regard to people who have made contributions, Mr. Lougheed made a donation to the New Democratic Party, Mr. Lougheed made a donation to the Conservative Party of Canada, Mr. Lougheed donated to the New Democratic Party Mr. Lougheed donated to the New Democratic Party, and Mr. Lougheed also donated to the Conservative Party again. This is just public record, folks. This is not something that I made up in the south end of Peterborough. I wanted to make sure we got that on the record.

But other things are interesting in Ontario's economy today. Just the other day, of course, Loblaw announced that they're going to make a big new investment right here in Ontario. What this tells me is that there's confidence in Ontario—confidence in Ontario going forward.

Just a week ago, I was in the East City Coffee Shop in Peterborough. For those of you who know Peterborough, the East City Coffee Shop, Hunter Street East, right across from the Quaker Oats building—wonderful oatmeal. I recommend that everybody start their day with Quaker Oats made right in Peterborough, a great product. I was sitting there having my usual western sandwich and a cup of coffee, \$5.50. You throw in a buck tip, so that's \$6.50.

What were they talking to me about there? They were saying to me, "Jeff, you got to get on. You've got to keep investing in infrastructure, investing in health care, investing in Peterborough. These are the kinds of things that we're interested in in the East City Coffee Shop in Peterborough." Let me tell you, the clientele that's at the East City Coffee Shop—big business, small business, union people, nurses, doctors, teachers—they all like to go there because you can have a frank conversation. I try to go there on Friday and sit at the middle table. It's an opportunity that we can have a little chit-chat on the issues of the day.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Talk about Gogama.

Hon. Jeff Leal: In fact, yes. I want to thank our new member from Sudbury, who was on the ground there, that devastation that occurred in Gogama dealing with a train derailment. I know our new member from Sudbury—

Mr. Arthur Potts: Failing infrastructure.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Well, failing infrastructure, and where's the federal government? They have responsibility for railroad lines in Canada. I do know that our new member from Sudbury, a great guy, dedicated to his community, will be taking up this cause to make sure that Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Transport Minister Lisa Raitt show their responsibility, make those investments for CN and CP to make sure that cargo that's carried on railroads through communities in northern Ontario, southern Ontario, eastern Ontario and western Ontario is done in a safe manner. The federal government has the responsibility to guarantee that safety in the province of Ontario. Mr. Speaker, that's very important.

The other thing I'd like to mention today is the growth in Ontario's agricultural sector. The agricultural sector in Ontario generates \$34 billion in GDP in the province of Ontario, second only to the auto sector in terms of importance. That's significant. That's something that we need to talk about each and every day. It employs 760,000 Ontarians each and every day. The manufacturing component of our agricultural sector now is about 23%, and growing each day. We know that Loblaw's just made a big announcement yesterday about investments that they're going to make in Ontario and right across Canada in the broader agri-food sector. There's growth taking place when you talk to dairy farmers, chicken farmers and egg producers.

But I want to make sure to get on the record today that Ontario farmers, particularly in the supply managed area, are very concerned about these new trade negotiations called the TPP, the Trans-Pacific Partnership. We do know that the United States, Japan, Australia and New Zealand continue to point to the Canadian supply managed system.

The Canadian supply managed system is the best model ever developed for agriculture. It was developed by two very distinguished agriculture ministers from Ontario: Bill Stewart, and from Ottawa, the legendary Eugene Whelan. They came together. They set aside partisan politics to do what was best for Canadian farmers, particularly farmers in Ontario and Quebec, where we have the dairy industry centred and where we have chickens and eggs. They came together because they knew it was just the right thing to do.

Supply management, as I said, is the greatest system ever designed. On our side of the House, we believe in supply management today, supply management tomorrow, supply management forever. Let me tell you, this Premier and this government will go to the nth mile to defend supply management. We want to keep our eyes on what's going on in Ottawa. Maybe some other members from the Brampton area who may be going to Ottawa in the not-too-distant future are going to defend supply management.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to get those things on the record.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate? I recognize the member from Elgin-Middlesex-London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Thank you very much, Speaker, for the opportunity to speak today. After listening to the Minister of Agriculture, you would think Ontario was full of unicorns and butterflies, and everything was perfect. However, I brought the truth of what's really going on. I brought the Auditor General's report, which I will be using during this debate to back up what I'm going to talk about.

Today we're talking about Bill 72, the Supply Act, which basically allows the government to pay their bills after March 31, because they're not going to get the budget passed by the time the new fiscal year begins, and until they do pass it, the government does need the ability to pay their bills. That's why we're here today debating this bill. Unfortunately, the government couldn't get its act together and get a budget presented and passed on time, again, for a record consecutive year that they're unable to do so.

I do want to discuss the fact that this year the government is struggling to reach their goal of only having a \$12.5-billion deficit—\$12.5 billion that we don't have in this province that they're spending. They're struggling; they spend so much money that they have difficulty even reaching \$12.5 billion in overspending. I can tell you today, if the average taxpayer ran their household like this government runs their bank account, nobody would be owning a house, nobody would have a job, and this government would have less money that they could waste.

I'd also like to point out that interest payments have cracked \$11 billion. That's \$11 billion that does not go to the hospitals, does not go to education, does not go to the environment, does not go to social programs. It's \$11 billion given to the banks because they have been spending the money unwisely throughout the years. If you look at the deficit of \$12.5 billion, and the \$11 billion, that's \$23 billion more that is spent than we have in this province.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General states that by 2017, the debt of this province will be \$325 billion. Could you imagine \$325 billion? What does the Auditor General say about that, about indebtedness? I think it's important that we read about this because I know most people in Ontario don't get an opportunity to read the Auditor General's report. They go based on what's said here at Queen's Park. If you listen to the government, as I said before, you'd think that it was sunshine and lollipops everywhere around this province. However, "Consequences of High Indebtedness"—this is the Auditor General, an officer of the Legislature: "High levels of indebtedness have consequences for governments, including the following: Debt-servicing costs take funding away from other government programs."

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You've heard many members of the opposition state what's going on throughout their ridings, the cuts that are occurring, the quiet cuts, the cuts that everyday people don't see right away but that will affect them later down the road because they don't have the money to do so.

I just learned this week that for the orthopedic surgeons in my hospital, the St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital, the funding was cut off mid-February for them to do any hip or knee joint replacements—cut off mid-February. They're sitting cancelling OR time the rest of February and all of March because they won't get a dime until April, the new funding year. I find it despicable. The wait times are outrageous for the people of my riding to get new hips and knees. Having an elderly person sitting at home, unable to move because of the pain, not only is bad for their health physically, but mentally as well. These people need to get fixed as soon as possible. They need to get back to recovery and enjoying their lives. Unfortunately, this government has spent—what are we saying?—\$12.5 billion more than they needed to. We're \$325 billion in debt, and what's happening? You don't really see it; you don't really hear it. You just hear about wait times: They're working on wait times. But people back at home don't realize the fact that for a month and a half, they fund zero replacement surgeries for hips and knees in Elgin-Middlesex-London. I find it quite serious—as the Auditor General said, the "crowding out" effect, the fact that they are crowding services because they don't know how to rein in their spending. They don't know how to balance a budget.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's a little bit on deficit, interest payments and debt. This is why we always stand up here and profess to this government that if you don't rein in your spending, if you don't try to balance the budget, you're going to destroy the services. Unfortunately, it

happens that the smaller communities around the province get hit first. They are the ones that get nailed first, and if you look on the opposition benches, the majority of the small rural communities in Ontario aren't represented by this government.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to touch on energy, which is another problem in this province. Their long-term energy plan, which gets revised every year, doesn't seem to have a happy outcome for the people of this province.

And we'll talk about the Auditor General's report again with regard to smart meters. Smart metering—this is the Auditor General, again an officer of the court. "Under the initiative, ratepayers were supposed to use less electricity during peak times; as a result, Ontario would not need to immediately expand its power-generating capacity. Peak demand reduction targets set by the Ministry of Energy have not been met, ratepayers have had significant billing concerns, and ratepayers are also paying significantly more to support the expansion of power-generating capacity while also covering the cost of the implementation of smart metering."

The global adjustment now accounts for 70% of time-of-use rates, while the market price of electricity accounts for only 30% of those rates. People in my riding are being gouged for energy, and it's on the backs of the policy by this government. Again, where's the focus on actually being economically responsible, financially responsible to the people of Ontario? It's being lost.

I'd also like to raise this issue, since we are talking about expenditures that this government is making. There's an account in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry called the special purpose account. By legislation, this government is supposed to table reports year by year on how that money is spent. That money is collected from the hunters and anglers of this province, the commercial fisherpeople. That money is supposed to be reinvested into the resource management of this province. It's been three years—three years—since this government has tabled documents outlining the expenses of the special purpose account. It's all I hear from hunters and anglers: "Where's my money going?" Instead, this government comes forward saying that the special purpose account has no money. They need to raise more revenue—because who knows where they spent it?—and what do they do? They introduce a special service fee: \$2 on anything that has to do with hunting and fishing. You buy an Outdoors card, a fishing licence, you buy a deer licence, a turkey licence, a tag—\$2 plus HST. Don't forget the HST. However, the way they manipulate things, none of those service fees go to the special purpose account. It goes to general revenue that they can spend however they want. They still have not yet tabled the documents. The hunters and anglers are getting pretty upset about the lack of respect that this government is showing them, and in addition they're now floating the idea of introducing a seniors' fishing licence. Mr. Speaker, how can you introduce a new fishing licence for seniors when you won't even tell us how you spend the money in the special purpose account and where the

money is going? What are you hiding over there? Let it out. Let us see where the money has gone.

I have a hunch: They're not spending it where they should be spending it. Hopefully that's going to be tabled soon. But for three years—we're heading into the fourth year—this bill speaks to them spending their money because they can't get their budget date correct. But we have questions as to how they spend their money, and they're not transparent. They're not accountable. They're not forthcoming. Hopefully someday you will table these monies and we'll have a good discussion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: There's something I really want to clarify. When we voted against the budget when it was presented, we had stated very clearly that this budget was an austerity budget. We were mocked for doing so, and people said this was the most progressive budget in the history of Ontario.

Slowly people started to see the cuts, and slowly they started to see the evidence. The Liberal government saying that it was progressive wasn't a fact. In fact, what we realized was on The Agenda. In front of Mr. Paikin, their hand-picked Liberal economist, Mr. Drummond, stated very clearly that, as a result of this budget, he would not be surprised if Ontario was 100,000 less in terms of jobs in the public sector.

This government, this party, campaigns progressively, but they run exactly like their Tory friends.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Bradley has moved second reading of Bill 72, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a 10-minute bell.

"Pursuant to standing order 28(h), I request that the vote on second reading of Bill 72 be deferred until deferred votes on Wednesday, March 11, 2015."

That is signed by the chief government whip, Mr. Delaney.

Second reading vote deferred.

INFRASTRUCTURE FOR JOBS AND PROSPERITY ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'INFRASTRUCTURE AU SERVICE DE L'EMPLOI ET DE LA PROSPÉRITÉ

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 9, 2014, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 6, An Act to enact the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2015 / Projet de loi 6, Loi édictant la Loi de 2015 sur l'infrastructure au service de l'emploi et de la prospérité.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): When this item of business was last debated, the member for Wellington–Halton Hills had the floor, with time remaining.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I appreciate this opportunity to resume my comments on Bill 6, an Act to enact the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2014, and appreciate the comments from across the floor from a number of the ministers who are well aware of the need for the Morriston bypass south of Guelph.

I look forward to their continued support to encourage the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Infrastructure to support getting that project on the southern highways program, the five-year plan that the Ministry of Transportation has for new highway construction.

1730

The Minister of the Environment is well aware of the issue. The Minister of Agriculture and Food is well aware of the issue. The minister without portfolio and deputy House leader, Chair of Cabinet, I know, is very well aware of the issue, and also the Minister of Municipal Affairs, who I know is very interested and very supportive of the need to build the Morriston bypass so as to solve that big infrastructure issue with respect to a number of communities, not just in my riding, but obviously south into Hamilton. I'll talk about that later on.

At the same time, I think I have an obligation to at least tell the members a bit about my views on the bill itself. If I don't soon, the Speaker is going to remind me that we're discussing Bill 6 and not just any infrastructure program in my riding that I would like to see funded as soon as possible.

This bill, as we know, would compel "the government and every broader public sector entity" to "consider a specified list of infrastructure planning principles when making decisions respecting infrastructure."

We know that the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure would be compelled to "periodically develop a long-term infrastructure plan setting out, among other things, a description of the current state of wholly or partly government-owned infrastructure assets"—and that would be a very, very long list, Mr. Speaker, if you think of all the infrastructure assets that the province owns in part or in whole—and a list of their condition, obviously, and an assessment of their long life, "a description of the current state of wholly or partly government-owned infrastructure assets, a description of the government's anticipated infrastructure needs for at least the next 10 years, and a strategy to meet those needs. Each long-term infrastructure plan must be made public."

If Bill 6 is passed, the government would be required and compelled to "consider a specified list of criteria when evaluating and prioritizing proposed projects for the construction of infrastructure assets.

"Subject to specified limitations," the government would be required to ensure "that architects and persons with demonstrable expertise in and experience with"—I

assume that means qualified professional engineers and others—"design relating to infrastructure assets be involved in the design of certain infrastructure assets."

The government would ensure "that certain numbers of apprentices be employed or engaged in the construction or maintenance by the government of infrastructure assets," and the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure would have to "consult with potentially affected persons or bodies before a regulation may be made under the act."

That is, of course, what the government would have us believe the bill is intended to do.

If passed, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2014, would enshrine a set of principles, requirements and recommendations to promote improved infrastructure planning in the province of Ontario. I think that's a laudable goal, quite frankly. I think it's reasonable to assume that we need to have a series of principles that make sense, requirements and authorities to ensure that, in fact, there is good infrastructure planning going forward for the province. No matter who is in government, I think that those are commendable objectives.

Section 1 of the proposed legislation sets out of the purpose of the act, which is "to establish mechanisms to encourage principled, evidence-based and strategic long-term infrastructure planning," which I mentioned earlier. The government is saying they would want to support "job creation and training opportunities, economic growth and protection of the environment, and incorporate design excellence into infrastructure planning." Again, I think these are goals that are reasonable and sensible.

Section 2 of the bill sets out a series of definitions which would be used to interpret the proposed legislation.

Section 3 sets out a specified list of infrastructure planning principles which the government and every broader public sector entity must consider when making decisions with respect to infrastructure. This is one of the most important parts of the bill, in my opinion, where the government actually sets out the principles whereby infrastructure planning would take place.

The principle that they're talking about is: "(1) Infrastructure planning and investment should take a long-term view and decision-makers should take into account the needs of Ontarians by being mindful of, among other things, demographic and economic trends in Ontario."

Surely we would hope that our infrastructure investments are going to be benefiting the province of Ontario over the long term, over, say, a 30-year or 40-year span, depending on the expected life of the project. If you think of a bridge or you think of a school or a hospital, I think most of us would assume that those projects should have a lifespan of at least 30 to perhaps 50 years, and so we should be thinking in terms of the long term when we're developing the infrastructure planning. And I agree with that.

"Infrastructure planning and investment should take into account any applicable budgets or fiscal plans, such

as fiscal plans released under the Fiscal Transparency and Accountability Act ... and budgets adopted under ... the Municipal Act ... or ... the City of Toronto Act.”

I think, obviously, that speaks to our ability to pay for these infrastructure assets over the long term as well. If we have long-term fiscal planning, if we have long-term—unfortunately, under this government, it’s long-term deficit planning. We don’t seem to be getting any closer to this long, much-vaunted goal of a balanced budget by 2017-18. In fact, the deficit is \$12.5 billion this year, apparently. That was the number that was in the provincial budget that was introduced in the Legislature before the election. That was the number for the deficit that was in the provincial budget that was presented to this House in the summer when we sat after the election, and it’s the number that’s in the fall economic statement that the government released before Christmas—a \$12.5-billion deficit, actually up year over year from the previous year of \$10.5 billion.

At the same time, the government would lead us to believe that they are, in fact, getting closer to a balanced budget. You would think, Mr. Speaker, if that were the case, the deficit would be going down a bit each year until it’s zero at 2017-18, if you believe the government in their commitment and if they’re able to achieve it.

But instead we see a deficit that went up \$2 billion year over year from last year to the current fiscal year that is ending in March. This is something that the government doesn’t really talk about too much, but certainly when the next provincial budget comes out, we would anticipate a much lower deficit figure than \$12.5 billion if indeed the government is going to be making meaningful progress towards its goal of balancing the budget by 2017-18, as they’ve said. But I’ve digressed a bit, and I want to get back to talking about the infrastructure principles that are identified in the bill.

The government says, “Infrastructure priorities should be clearly identified in order to better inform investment decisions respecting infrastructure.” Again, I think it is reasonable for the government to go through a priority-setting exercise so as to ensure that money isn’t being wasted and the public dollars, taxpayers’ dollars, are being well spent and in a way that’s demonstrably sensible and that is transparent for all to see. Setting priorities is an important responsibility of government, and I would agree that that should be an important principle.

In number four, they say, “Infrastructure planning and investment should ensure the continued provision of core public services, such as health care and education.” I think all of us in the province of Ontario benefit from a public education system that’s strong and well-resourced and that is supported and encouraged by all of us here in this Legislature, and we all rely on a health care system that is there when we need it. I think that those are the most important provincial government services that the provincial government is responsible for, and, again, those are the priorities, I think, for most of us in our constituencies.

Also, when you talk to people across our ridings and across the province, there are many other subjective opinions on what should be infrastructure priorities. So this is going to be a slightly more difficult exercise for the government, if indeed this bill is passed, to set those priorities. But, again, I think it is incumbent upon the government to set sensible priorities and be transparent about the decisions that are made.

Principle number five that the government articulates: Investment decisions respecting infrastructure “should promote economic competitiveness, productivity, job creation and training opportunities.”

Mr. Speaker, in the recent rounds of infrastructure spending that the federal and provincial governments have announced, particularly after the recession in 2009, one of the key criteria that governments talked about was the need to have shovel-ready projects. I can understand, when there’s an economic downturn and job creation is priority one for government, that shovel-ready projects have a certain attractiveness. But at the same time, I think it’s really important that all of our projects that we look at, especially when we’re going the extra mile to find new money for infrastructure projects—economic competitiveness and long-term economic payback should be very high priorities and high criteria, vis-à-vis shovel-ready, in fact, because I think if we are going into debt to pay for these infrastructure projects, obviously we would want to, and hope to, see a long-term return on that investment.

The government has articulated the belief that, “Infrastructure planning and investment should foster innovation by creating opportunities to make use of innovative technologies, services and practices, particularly where doing so would utilize technology, techniques and practices developed in Ontario.”

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I think we hear from a number of different quarters across the province about the need to understand how important innovation is to the future of our economy, whether it’s in business, whether it’s in government or the non-profit sector, or whether it’s here in this Legislature. Even the most recent report from Roger Martin’s Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity recommended—I think it’s a sensible recommendation—that innovation be included and incorporated into the school curriculum so that we encourage our children, our students, to think in terms of innovation as an opportunity for them and to ensure that they start thinking in those terms, so that going forward when they’re in post-secondary education and they go into the work world, they think in terms of innovation. If that’s always in the back of their mind—how do we make things better, and how do we ensure that our processes continue to be modernized? It’s the whole idea of kaizen, the Japanese concept of continuous improvement. These are things that are really important for our economy. I think it makes sense, and I commend Roger Martin for making that recommendation in his report. I would agree, certainly, that the idea of encouraging innovation in terms of our infrastructure principles is a sensible idea as well.

Principle number seven: "Infrastructure planning and investment should be evidence-based and transparent, and, subject to" legal restrictions. "Investment decisions ... should be made on the basis of public information." We talk a lot about the need to be more transparent, and certainly the government has, I think, in a general sense tried to suggest that they're acting in a transparent manner. We see numerous examples in this House where in fact that is not the case and the government is not behaving in a transparent way. But again, I think it's reasonable that we should set this objective in the legislation and try to challenge government, whoever is in power—there will be changes in government in the next 25 or 30 years, we anticipate; maybe sooner than that—and we need to make sure that our decisions with respect to infrastructure are transparent and that we can get the information out so that people can understand what it is that the government is up to.

Another principle is, "Where provincial or municipal plans or strategies have been established in Ontario, under an act or otherwise, but do not bind or apply to the government or broader public sector ... the government or broader public sector entity should nevertheless be mindful of those plans and strategies" so there's sort of a comprehensive approach and we're not doing one-offs. Again, I think that's something that needs to be considered.

"Infrastructure planning and investment should minimize the impact ... on the environment and respect and help maintain ecological and biological diversity...." Again, I think that all of us in this House would concur that we need to ensure that our natural environment is protected with respect to infrastructure projects, and that whatever infrastructure projects that we have in our long-term plan in no way impact negatively on the environment.

They're also saying that other principles could be set out by regulation for the government or the broader public sector entity. That, I think, Mr. Speaker, is one of the biggest concerns that I have about the bill. We have these principles enshrined in the act, but at the same time, if this bill is passed in its current form, we empower the minister and the cabinet to change these principles through an order in council. As we know, Mr. Speaker, if that process is pursued, principles could be changed without any public knowledge before the decision is made, and we would probably only be informed after the fact through the Ontario Gazette or if the government chose to inform the general public that they had made changes to the principles. That's a concern for me.

Obviously, if we need to put the principles in the act, I don't know why we wouldn't ensure that if the principles should be changed, that we would come back to the Legislature from time to time to review them, as opposed to doing it through the order-in-council mechanism and through regulation, without giving MPPs an opportunity to scrutinize the proposed principle changes and ensure that we have proper oversight from this Legislature on that aspect of the bill. I would again suggest that there needs to be more discussion about that. I would hope that

if we do go to committee, there will be opportunities for us to discuss that. I'm sure that our party will want to bring forward amendments to that particular section of the bill.

Section 4 of the proposed legislation requires the Minister of Economic Development to develop long-term infrastructure plans setting out, among other things, a description of the current state of wholly or partly government-owned infrastructure assets. Again, that will be a very long list: all the infrastructure assets that the government owns in part or in whole across the province and a description of their state of repair and what's going to have to be done going forward.

Again, that is a big make-work project for the Ministry of Infrastructure, without question, and for Infrastructure Ontario. The government is giving itself up to three years to develop this list. I really don't know how long—I was thinking about that, and I'd like to get some expert advice. Again, that's something that needs to be discussed at committee.

Is it reasonable to take three years to compile that list or could we ask each of the ministries to compile their list of infrastructure assets in less time? You would think presumably that each ministry would have some sort of consolidated list of the infrastructure assets that it owns and maintains. The government is asking or expecting municipalities to do long-term infrastructure planning, have a database and an assessment of their current infrastructure assets. I would hope and expect that most ministries have done the same. So I don't know if it'll take three years, but again the government is leaving the door open, if need be, to take three years to develop this list.

If you fast-forward three years—we're now almost one year—it's hard to believe—into the mandate of the current government. This three-year period would perhaps be just before the next provincial election. I'm not sure if there's a political time frame in mind with the development of the three-year provision. I can't imagine that there'd be politics in any of these decisions.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Not at all.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Never; never. But at the same time, I would caution the members to think about that, and I would hope that it doesn't take three years to develop that list.

The expectation going forward, if this bill were passed, would be that a new list would be compiled every five years at least, and tabled every five years.

Section 5 would require the Minister of Economic Development to publish a long-term infrastructure plan on a government website and to maintain an archive of the long-term infrastructure plans, and that's only reasonable. Obviously, if the government has a plan and wants to ensure that the general public has access to it and can see it, it should be prominently on the ministry's website and easily accessible: people can find it easily, and it's not buried on the website.

Section 6: The government is going to be required, if this bill passes, to consider a specified list of criteria when evaluating and prioritizing proposed projects for

the construction of infrastructure assets and that the list of criteria to be considered include whether the infrastructure asset is planned for a provincial or a municipal plan or strategy described in principle 7 or section 3 or in a long-term infrastructure plan published by the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure.

The second criteria is “all related capital costs and operating costs expected to arise over the useful life of the infrastructure asset”—again, at least our best guess of what it’s going to cost over the long term to operate and maintain the asset.

The third criteria would be “whether the construction of the infrastructure asset” would be “expected to,

“(i) be a long-term return on investment,

“(ii) stimulate productivity and economic competitiveness,

“(iii) maximize tax assessment values and tax base growth,

“(iv) support any other public policy goals of the government of Ontario or of any affected municipalities in Ontario, and

“(v) provide a foundation for further infrastructure projects.”

Section 6 would permit the minister, along with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, to issue additional criteria that would be considered. Again, I would offer the same caution and concern that if we believe that these criteria should be included in the legislation but we can add additional criteria through the order-in-council mechanism, whereby a minister would simply bring the proposal to cabinet without necessarily telling the public about it until after the fact, cabinet approves it and then it has the force of law through regulation—if, indeed, it makes sense to put the initial criteria in the legislation, I question very strongly, should we not come back to the House if we’re going to be adding to the criteria and should we not ensure that legislation needs to be considered so that we can have a fulsome debate in this House?

Again, I would offer that caution to the government when they’re considering moving forward with Bill 6. I hope that we have the opportunity to discuss that issue in committee as well.

Section 6 also permits the minister, with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, as I said, to “issue additional criteria.” That’s the concern.

Prior to issuing the criteria, the minister is required to consult with such bodies and individuals as the minister “considers appropriate.” What does that mean, Mr. Speaker, that “the minister considers appropriate”? Who is he or she going to consult? Is he going to consult with people perhaps at Liberal fundraisers? Is he going to consult with certain close associates and advisers? Or is he going to have a broad public consultation inviting comment from all across the province and ensuring that he gets the best advice possible? That is not clear in the legislation, as far as I know.

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In section 7, if the bill is passed, the government would be required to ensure that architects and infrastructure design experts be involved in the design of certain listed infrastructure assets where the construction costs are over an amount to be set by regulation. The requirement applies to the following infrastructure assets, if they’re wholly owned by the government: transportation assets, including highways, bridges and transit systems; cultural infrastructure assets that are intended primarily for the study and enjoyment of art or their production; and museums and certain other assets identified under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Again, the government would have us believe that they’re trying to ensure a high standard of professionalism in terms of the design of these projects and employing qualified architects and, I assume, as I said earlier, professional engineers to ensure that there is a high standard of excellence in the design of these projects.

Again, I think that’s something that’s going to have to be explored at committee further. There may be groups that want to comment on that and seek clarification of what that means, and I would anticipate that we will hear from qualified professionals who want to get further clarification on that. I think we need to make sure that all interests are considered while, at the same time, working to achieve the goal of having a high standard of design so that these projects are of benefit to the people of Ontario over the long run.

This requirement would also apply to other infrastructure assets wholly owned by the government that are prescribed by regulation and any infrastructure assets partially owned by the government for which the minister provides any funding that may be set out in regulation.

Section 8 would obligate the government to require that certain numbers of apprentices be employed or engaged in the construction or maintenance by the government of infrastructure assets, the number of required apprentices to be set out in regulation.

As you know very well, Mr. Speaker, the government has brought in the Ontario College of Trades, and it has been very controversial. There are many people who are qualified in the trades who are very concerned about the high costs of renewing their membership in the college. They question very strongly the value of the Ontario College of Trades in terms of their day-to-day work. For many people who are in the trades, the cost went up dramatically because of the introduction of the College of Trades. I forget the percentage increase, but it was absolutely significant in terms of what they had paid before for their licences and what they were going to be expected to pay going forward.

Our party, for a number of years, has called upon the government to reform the apprenticeship system. I was very pleased to hear my friend and colleague the member for Whitby—Oshawa, when she announced a number of her economic ideas last week just outside the Legislature, talk about the need to reform the apprenticeship system in the province of Ontario.

Our party, for a long time, has advocated a one-to-one journeyman-to-apprentice ratio, instead of the current ratios, in some cases I believe four journeymen to one apprentice in some of the trades. That reduces the job opportunities for our young people in the province of Ontario by maintaining those ratios. I think there are some who would obviously benefit by the maintenance of the status quo, but we side with the young people who are looking for jobs and need jobs, and we would like to see more apprenticeship opportunities opened up. That has been the position of our caucus for quite a number of years now, and we continue to advocate for that.

I think this may very well be a contentious part of the bill. We need to have further discussion in committee so as to ensure that we understand what the government's intent is with respect to this section of the bill and to ensure that in fact there are job opportunities for our young people. If there are ways to ensure that we can modernize our apprenticeship system to ensure that we open up those apprenticeship opportunities, that would be a good thing for the province of Ontario and obviously a good thing for the young people who would get those opportunities.

Section 9 prohibits action being brought against the crown in right of Ontario as a result of the proposed legislation or anything done as a result of it, providing legal protection so that the government won't be sued.

Section 10 makes clear that any existing legal obligations of a government or broader public sector entity continue unaltered despite the proposed legislation coming into force. Some of these later provisions are, in fact, fairly routine in terms of government legislation of this sort.

I think it is important to point out the fiscal context upon which we discuss this infrastructure issue. As I said earlier, the deficit is \$12.5 billion this fiscal year; the fiscal year ends at the end of March. The government has yet to inform the House when the next provincial budget is going to be presented in this Legislature. We hear various rumours. Usually and typically—and I think it would be in the public interest—the Treasurer, the Minister of Finance, would inform the House when the budget is going to be tabled in this House. In recent years, the provincial government has made it a practice or at least made an effort to present the provincial budget before the end of the fiscal year, before the end of March. In recent years—

Hon. James J. Bradley: Waiting for the feds.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Well, I know the feds are late this year because of a number of external realities that they're facing. But at the same time, we hear that the provincial government in fact might be introducing its budget before the federal government introduces their budget, which would be somewhat unusual, but we will have to see what they do.

Again, I think it would be helpful for the Legislature to know the budget date. I would call upon the government to tell us as soon as possible.

Interjection.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I would anticipate that this budget will be presented in the Legislature, and I think that's a good thing, I say to the Chair of Cabinet. I would prefer that we hear the budget in the House.

I think it's also important to point out that the projected net provincial debt—the number that was put in the fall economic statement, which was presented in the House; the most recent significant economic statement that the Minister of Finance has presented to the House—as of this year is \$287.3 billion, Mr. Speaker, up from \$139 billion when this government took power in 2003. It has more than doubled in the approximately 11 years, almost 12 years now, that this provincial government has held office, obviously demonstrating a pattern of systematic deficit financing of government operations. I would argue an unwillingness on the part of the government to live within its means. I would argue insufficient fiscal discipline on the part of the government, where they seem to think that it's okay to continue to borrow massive sums of money and leave that debt to the next generation. Mr. Speaker, that is something obviously that we're going to be continuing to discuss in this Legislature.

This year's fiscal plan, as outlined in the provincial budget and the fall economic statement, shows that the government intends to spend \$130.2 billion this year, up from \$126.4 billion last year. Again, while the government would have us believe that they're working towards a balanced budget in 2017-18, in fact, year over year, their spending was up almost \$4 billion—\$4 billion. Yet they would have us believe that they're on track to balance this budget in just a couple of years. I don't know how they're going to achieve it. We will have to hear more about that, I'm sure, when the provincial budget is released.

Another important indicator of the level of debt in the province of Ontario is the net debt per capita. The fall economic statement says that the net debt per capita, in effect, the amount that every man, woman and child in the province of Ontario owes because of years and years of provincial government overspending, is \$21,003—\$21,003. Again, that's up from \$11,339 in 2003—almost doubled.

I think, Mr. Speaker, you're informing me that it's 6 o'clock. I have so much more to say, but I think I'm going to have to respect that it's 6 o'clock. I appreciate the opportunity to address the House this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Wellington—Halton Hills, and we will continue his debate at a later time.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Since it is now 6 o'clock, this chamber is adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

The House adjourned at 1759.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenante-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes
Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiles, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Emie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
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Wednesday 11 March 2015

Mercredi 11 mars 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Wednesday 11 March 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mercredi 11 mars 2015

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

AGRICULTURE INSURANCE ACT (AMENDING THE CROP INSURANCE ACT, 1996), 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ASSURANCE AGRICOLE (MODIFIANT LA LOI DE 1996 SUR L'ASSURANCE-RÉCOLTE)

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 10, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 40, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur l'assurance-récolte (Ontario) et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It is an honour to rise in this House and to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 40. Of course, we know that Bill 40 is the Agriculture Insurance Act. It's an act to amend the Crop Insurance Act of 1996.

This particular bill sounds impressive at first; however, Ontario farmers actually grow and raise more than 200 different commodities, so less than half are currently covered by production insurance. And so far too long, Ontario farmers have been at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts around the country. Ontario is the only province left in Canada that does not have legislative authority to offer plans for a broad range of agricultural products. Ontario is once again left having to play catch-up.

If passed, Bill 40 would extend this coverage to farmers who produce products other than crops and perennial plants. They will finally have access to the insurance they need to protect their livelihoods, the same basic protections that other farmers across the country have had for years. This will of course increase the stability within our agricultural sector, and it is a move that I wholeheartedly support.

There are just about 2,200 farms in Chatham-Kent, which account for, surprisingly, 3.8% of Ontario's total farms. This is down from the 2001 census, but it's still a lot of farms.

Leamington is known as the greenhouse capital of North America, with an astonishing 1,500 acres under cover or, as I like to say, under glass. In addition to these farms, greenhouses in Chatham-Kent also now account for 3.2% of Ontario's total greenhouse area. One of note—and I worked with this particular company to help them get established in their location in Chatham—was Cedarline Greenhouses, which recently partnered with GreenField Ethanol, which was actually a very unique opportunity. With the partnering of GreenField Ethanol, they now are able to use surplus heat and carbon dioxide to save about 40% on heating costs. It was an amazing opportunity, an amazing business approach to reducing their costs and yet creating jobs and employment right in Chatham-Kent.

As an industry, agriculture provides about 16,000 jobs and is a \$3-billion sector in just Chatham-Kent alone. Chatham-Kent-Essex is home to some of the most fertile land in Ontario and Canada. Cash crops include wheat, soy beans, corn—and apparently wind turbines. They're sprouting up all over prime farmland, Mr. Speaker.

My riding is also the number one producer of tomatoes, seed corn and pumpkins in all of Canada, and in addition produces nearly 20% of all vegetables grown in Ontario. We're the number one producer of sugar beets, green peas, broccoli, lavender, cauliflower and quail in all of Ontario. I'm very proud of my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex.

Another group that comes part and parcel with agriculture is the food producers of Ontario. Food processors know the importance of local food. Nearly 40% of food manufacturers are in fact located in rural Ontario. They realize the value in using local food in their products. Of the total food produced on Ontario farms, roughly 65% of it is used by the province's food producers. Food processing is a \$33-billion industry that employs 110,000 Ontarians in related industries.

In my riding of Chatham-Kent-Essex, the food production industry has been hit hard over the last few years, most notably with the closure of the Heinz plant in Leamington. They used to employ 740 full time, roughly 200 part time, and they had roughly between 45 and 50 growers. Well, that number has been slashed, cut, reduced, almost cannibalized, and now roughly 250 people work full-time at the company that actually took over Heinz, which is Highbury Canco.

Last July, the Canadian Association of Professional Apiculturists released a report that indicated a mortality rate of 58% of Ontario's bee population. The typical winter bee loss rate is around 15%, according to the

report. This is a big reason why the neonics issue has become such a hot topic over the past year. Imagine a cattle farmer heading outside to tend the cows only to find that nearly 50% of them had died. Bees are in fact essentially livestock for beekeepers, and the past year has been devastating to the industry. In December, the member for Haldimand-Norfolk asked the Premier why her government had not implemented an insurance model to help the province's beekeepers. Manitoba currently offers such a program. Well, the government's response was less than encouraging. The Premier declined to confirm if Ontario will be getting a similar program and then referred the matter to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Of course we understand that we need to address the root causes, if you will, but beekeepers need a relief strategy that is more immediate than stopping climate change. The government needs to have a long-term plan to try to resolve the bee mortality issue, but in the short term, Ontario beekeepers are going to need some help. We want to hear the input of the entire agricultural industry on this particular issue. It is incredibly important that we listen to them, as they're the real experts.

We have some concerns when it comes to ease of use and the response time of government when it comes to compensating for unexpected emergencies. Some 300,000 customers were left—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It's a little bit noisy. The member is right here, and I can hardly hear him. It would be nice if some of his colleagues would listen to him. Thanks so much.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

You know, when we talk about the fact that 300,000 customers were left without hydro in Toronto alone, similar damage occurred throughout the greater Toronto and Hamilton area in the aftermath of that storm. Again, this ties into the government's response to emergencies. After the storm, it was estimated that the cost would be somewhere around \$190 million to cover the damage from the ice storm. It took numerous cities and municipalities over a year to get the application completed, as the application itself was not immediately available.

0910

A recent article in the Hamilton Spectator showed just how disastrous the whole process was. "Hamilton needed most of a year, special training for 15 staffers and thousands of pages of supporting documents just to ask for \$4.1 million in provincial ice storm relief." Hamilton councillor Chad Collins was quoted in the article as saying, "I think everyone was kind of shocked at the hoops we had to go through.... If you think about it, we routinely apply for hundreds of millions of dollars for infrastructure projects and the process is far less rigorous."

When we talk about this particular bill—another thing is that our government in Ontario has paid nearly \$3 million to a company called LandLink Consulting to train

municipal staff to fill out applications. With that in mind, we're concerned about what the production insurance application and claim process will actually look like. If farmers are forced to wait over a year for relief from natural disasters or other impacts to their crops or commodities, they might not be in business by the time the insurance payment is actually issued. On this side, we call it red tape.

In conclusion, I just want to reiterate my support for Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act. It finally delivers on an issue that Ontario farmers have been championing for over a decade. As previously mentioned, Ontario is the only province left in the entire country that does not have the legislative authority to in fact offer plans for a broad range of agricultural products. While I am concerned that it took the government this long to act on the bill, it's better late than never.

But what I don't want to see is the loss or reduction of current programs that help farmers with the implementation of new measures. "Agricultural products" means a product that is designated by regulation." This means that the minister could make changes to the policy at a later date. The true test of the legislation will come long after it's passed.

One of the things that I'm concerned about is the process of payment, but something else as well is the fact that you have a situation with dairy farmers and ground current, which is in fact affecting milk production. It's killing the cattle itself. The fact is that they cannot put any dollars on lost milk production right now, and dairy farmers are going under. That is not right, and I stand in support of those dairy farmers. I believe that this particular act needs to support those dairy farmers. We need to get the ground current problem under control before it's way too late, because it not only affects cattle, it affects humans.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions, comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I have to applaud the member's passion, particularly for dairy farmers. I think it goes without saying how much we all appreciate, and should appreciate, our farmers and how much they've done for us and how much they do for us every day.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: We can't survive without them.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: We literally couldn't survive without our farmers. It's a robust part of our economy; it's an essential part of our lives. Food is something that we all use to celebrate; it's something that brings us together. And the people who are responsible for putting that food on our tables that helps us come together, that helps us celebrate, that helps us have those moments we all cherish and remember, are farmers. They are the ones who make that possible.

This bill, hopefully, if it's implemented in the right way, will protect them and will benefit them. It's something that speaks to our priorities. As a Legislature, we should ensure that the laws we pass speak to what we think is important. What's really important is that we

protect the people who are fundamental to our society. Farmers are absolutely fundamental to our society, and we should implement laws that protect them.

One of the realities is that the climate change we are seeing and the unpredictability of weather are putting farmers in a more and more difficult position. There is less ability to predict what is going to happen, and for farmers it's crucial that they have some anticipation, some ability to know: "Okay, the weather patterns are going to be a certain way, so we can anticipate what our crop is going to be like this year," or if it's livestock, they're able to predict the conditions so they can prepare for them. The growing uncertainty with weather is impacting farmers in a very difficult way. It's important for us to make sure we do whatever we can to assist, given the unpredictable nature of weather and climate now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Surprise, surprise. The Liberals didn't even want to comment, I guess.

I'm here this morning to speak to this bill. I only have two minutes in the questions and comments. You know the standing orders here, Speaker, as do the folks on the other side. I'm hoping to get a chance before the 10:15 recess before question period to speak to this bill, to speak to the importance of agriculture in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke.

As of this moment, we still have 16 members of our 28-person caucus who have yet to speak to this bill, a crucially important bill to folks in rural Ontario, which many of us represent. Only 12 of our members have had a chance to speak to this in debate.

We're hoping that the government is not going to bring in or call for closure. If they do, I make an impassioned plea to you, Speaker, to not recognize it at this time, because we understand what has been happening here in this House.

I want to have the opportunity to speak to this bill. I know that Mr. Hardeman, Ms. Munro, Mr. Hudak, Mr. Arnott, Ms. Jones, Mr. Bailey, Ms. Elliott, Mr. Hillier, Mr. MacLaren, Ms. MacLeod, Mr. McNaughton, Mr. Miller, Mr. Pettapiece and Ms. Thompson want to speak to this bill as well. So I hope that the government will allow us to do that and not try and shut this debate down here this morning.

I'm anxious to have that opportunity to speak about the wonderful people who are employed in and make their living by and make our lives better by the work they do in agriculture, not only in Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke but all across this great province. I hope this debate does not get shut down before we have the opportunity to do so.

I want to speak about the bill as well, Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act—changes that I'm very supportive of. I want to have that opportunity to offer my views on the legislation in a more complete way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Good morning, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Good morning.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's a pleasure to rise from my seat here today on behalf of the constituents in Windsor and Tecumseh, and talk about this very important bill dealing with farmers and agriculture.

Before I begin, I just want to mention that this is Sarnia-Lambton Day at the Legislature today. I know Mr. Bailey has invited us all to meet with the people from his community, most of them—a large portion of Sarnia-Lambton being rural—from the agricultural area. I know we would learn a great deal if we did take Mr. Bailey up on his generous offer to spend time with the chamber of commerce and others from Sarnia-Lambton today.

I listened very intently to what the member for Chatham-Kent-Essex had to say about the importance of this bill to his community. It's important to all of us in this House, because as I've said before, and as you've all heard, farmers feed cities. We can't take that for granted anymore. No matter where we go, no matter what we eat, the food on our table comes from the farming community.

So whatever we can do to expand insurance for farmers—to give them some kind of a rainy-day fund, if you will, if something goes wrong—we should be doing. And we should be listening to every voice in this House.

We all come here, 107 voices strong, 107 equal voices, and if we wish to be heard on a certain bill, we should be afforded that opportunity. When the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke spoke about the possibility of closure on this bill, I think he hit it right on. There are people who still wish to be heard, and if that's the case, we should all listen intently, because farmers feed cities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: I'm very pleased to rise once again to speak to this bill. But I think it's important to recognize that we've already had 78 members—78 members—of the Legislature who have spoken to this bill or participated in the debate during questions and comments.

0920

This bill has now been debated for 12 hours. We've heard from the opposition the importance of the farmers and the farming community in their ridings. I think it's important to understand that they're needlessly extending debate on Bill 40 by continuing to put up speakers. As I mentioned, 12 hours—12 hours—have already been debated on this bill and the government has extended debate by 6.5 hours, the threshold, so more members would have the opportunity to speak to this bill.

Listening to the debate, it's been clear that the majority of the members are in support of this bill, so that signals that there is no true desire to have further meaningful debate on this bill and their only goal is to delay it.

I'm calling on the opposition parties to stop stalling and to help us move forward this important piece of legislation so that we can continue to debate other im-

portant bills, bills like Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act; Bill 37, the Invasive Species Act; Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act; Bill 49—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I believe that if the member wants to have a one-on-one he might want to go outside with the member from Sudbury.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It will be a problem. I don't want to hear it.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just ending, we have Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act. Those would be great bills that we could also start debating.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Sorry; the member for Chatham—Kent—Essex.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: First of all, I'd like to thank the members from Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke and Windsor—Tecumseh, which used to be the home of—ho ho ho—the Green Giant. I recall that, especially as a young gaffer.

Of course, the comments issued by the member from Sudbury—I will challenge him on the fact that this is an important bill. This bill does need further consultation. We can get it into committee, I agree, but it needs to be heard because there are members, especially on this side, who in fact represent more of the rural community.

I do have a concern. This bill will, in fact, protect farmers, and I agree wholeheartedly with that. It needs more—no pun intended—beef in this particular bill, because it needs to protect farmers: not only those who grow cash crops, but what about our beef farmers? What about our dairy farmers? What about the beekeepers? And the list goes on.

I've had discussions with a member of my riding who, in fact, claims that ground current caused not only the death of his prize cattle, but also the death of his wife, because of the fact of what ground current does. We need to get that problem solved. We need to get that problem straightened out.

I visited a dairy farmer about a month and a half ago, and there were about 30 of us there. The OSPCA was there. Of course, cruelty to animals—do you want to bring that into this bill? It should be there as well. Because I'm very, very concerned about the livelihood of dairy farmers. And this particular farmer, who I know very well, back in my riding, has a prize Holstein. I saw that Holstein; it was healthy. He called me last week in tears. He said his prize Holstein, which he has \$10,000 invested in, is dying and is unable to produce milk simply because of the ground current. That, sir, needs to be taken care of. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order.

Mr. Ted Arnott: It is my hope to speak to Bill 40 this morning. I represent Wellington—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): That's not a point of order. Thank you.

Minister without Portfolio.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm pleased to participate in the debate on Bill 40 this morning. I know that the government House leader spoke to this bill yesterday as well. I want to reiterate some of what he said yesterday.

We're committed to helping our agricultural partners manage risk. That is why it's so important that we move forward on this bill as soon as possible and refer it to committee for further study. We know that business risk management programs like production insurance help producers deal with situations that are outside their control, such as weather, disease and extreme market fluctuation. Production insurance makes timely payments to producers and eliminates the need for costly ad hoc responses to adverse conditions.

Our province's inability to offer production insurance plans for commodities beyond crops and perennial plants represents a significant gap, as most members have agreed. When producers suffer losses and don't have production insurance coverage, they may come to us for direct or ad hoc assistance. We've seen ad hoc programs cost the province millions of dollars in a single year. Further, production insurance is also premium-based. This means the costs are shared by farmers and government, which encourages best practices and appropriate sharing of risk. This bill, if passed, will help our farmers better manage risk and encourage greater innovation, job creation and growth in the agri-food sector.

Mr. Speaker, our government introduced this important piece of legislation way back in November 2014. We've been debating the bill over nine different days, and our government allowed the debate to continue when we reached 6.5 hours of debate on this bill so that more members would have the opportunity to present their views of this bill that all members have indicated they support.

Further, speakers from the government side shared their 20-minute speaking segments among three or four members. Moreover, members from this side of the aisle stood down their speeches, following almost nine hours of debate, in order to allow the opposition members to have more opportunity to share their views on this bill that all three parties are on record as saying they are supporting.

Mr. Speaker, this bill has seen approximately 12 hours of debate and, according to my count, I think about 80 of the members have either spoken to this bill or participated in the debate during questions and comments. I believe there has been extensive debate on this bill. We have heard a wide range of viewpoints, opinions and perspectives, and I have enjoyed listening to all of them at that time. It is—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order: the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke. I

hope there are not going to be too many points of order while the member is speaking, but go ahead.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I can't determine that, Speaker, but I'm just raising my point of order. I'm only speaking for myself. Thank you very much.

Speaker, it's clear where the member is going with this. We see what's coming down the road very shortly—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): That's not a point of order. Thank you. Sit down.

Go ahead.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, I believe there has been extensive debate on this bill, and we have heard a wide range of views, opinions and perspectives. It is time that this bill is put to a vote for second reading and referred to committee, where some of the real and genuine work takes place.

As members know, in committee—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Excuse me, Minister.

Does the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke have a problem with my decision to tell him to sit down?

Mr. John Yakubuski: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Oh.

Mr. John Yakubuski: The decision? No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Oh. Good.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Not your decision—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Excuse me?

Mr. John Yakubuski: Not your decision, no.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): It is my decision.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I said no, I know that. I don't have a problem with your decision.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Good.

Continue.

Hon. James J. Bradley: As members know, in committee, members from all parties will hear from presenters who will have their invaluable opinion and perspective presented.

Also in committee, members from all three parties will have an opportunity to move amendments to change or strengthen the bill.

At the same time, this House can move on to debate substantive matters. There are a number of pieces of important legislation already introduced which the government would like to debate and move through the legislative process: Bill 6, the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act; Bill 9, the Ending Coal for Cleaner Air Act; Bill 37—I know a lot of members are interested in the Invasive Species Act; Bill 45, the Making Healthier Choices Act; Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act; Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act; and Bill 73, the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act.

We'd like to spend time debating some of the other important bills currently before the House, but we cannot until Bill 40 is dealt with. As a result, I move that this question be now put.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister without Portfolio has moved that we end debate on this particular item.

After listening to the pleas from certain individuals from the Conservatives about their lack of membership being allowed to speak to this, at this time, I believe the debate will continue.

The member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, I appreciate your ruling, and I appreciate the opportunity to provide a couple of questions and comments.

We do have a number of members here today who are prepared and will be speaking to this motion. I know that the member for Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke mentioned the same point earlier.

I want to take the opportunity to again talk about some unfinished business when it comes to our agricultural community and Bill 40.

0930

I was at the Grenville Federation of Agriculture meeting in my riding on Friday. It's one of the most successful and well-attended agricultural meetings in the riding. I did have some discussion about this bill, and I know that farmers are very interested in the legislative process that brings this bill through the House and into a committee for public hearings and then back to this House for third reading debate.

But still, it's been one year since the University of Guelph made their decision to shut our Kemptville campus, and regardless of the decision by this government to only fund the Alfred campus and not move forward with funding to help a new cohort of students for 2015-16, I still think it's a priority. I still think it should be a priority of this government, and I believe we should be able to use that opportunity to talk about the importance of agriculture education.

This bill is very important to our farmers, and I know that previous speakers this morning outlined—Mr. Nicholls, from our caucus, outlined some of issues in his riding. Agriculture education is crucial. We've got an issue in this province right now where the demand of students at the diploma and degree levels is three times the supply. It's high time that this government stopped hiding behind funding one college and not the other. They need to make a commitment to the community, they need to put some dollars on the table, and we need new, young farmers in college at that campus this fall.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? Questions and comments? Are we organized? The member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I was standing, Speaker. Thank you very much.

First of all, I just want to say that one of the things a number of us have been saying about this bill, and it was commented on in the member's speech, is that the bill itself is a step in the right direction. I don't think there's anybody in this House who is saying otherwise.

But one of the questions that has to be asked is—normally, if the government is going to make the type of

announcement where they're going to announce a shift in policy, when it comes to crop insurance in this particular case, you'd think that the government would have made an allocation for the dollars in the budget, so that when the bill was introduced in the House, the money was already appropriated and the government was able to say, "Here's the bill that gives us the mechanism to expand crops and others as far as risk management, and by the way, here's the money. We've appropriated it in the budget." In this particular case, I'm not aware that the government actually appropriated any of the dollars we need within the budget to deal with the additional dollars that will be needed, essentially in the risk management program that they've now expanded.

So the problem that we've got is: You've got a risk management program with a budget this big, you have a number of various types of farming activities that are covered under the current program, we're going to expand those things to other types of farming activities, but we have the same amount of money. As a result, it means to say that we could end up in a situation where we actually have less money to compensate farmers under the risk management program because the government hasn't appropriated the dollars. Neither the parliamentary assistant nor the minister nor anybody on the government side has ever responded to: Has the government appropriated the dollars necessary to make sure the uptake to this program when it goes into effect?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: On Bill 40 here, I guess the question is: What is the purpose at this point? I think the purpose at this point is to get this bill to committee so the work can be done to help farmers. It has to go through committee. I think there's agreement on all sides that this is urgent and that this work to give crop insurance and risk management insurance to farmers across the board in Ontario is urgent.

So the government is saying, "Yes, we agree with you, the opposition. We need to act to get out there to help farmers go through the committee process so we get input from farmers who come in and make representations." Yet the opposition is saying, "No, we don't want it to go ahead. We want to keep talking."

Let's stop the talk and walk the walk by bringing this to committee so that we can respond to the urgency of helping our agricultural communities all across Ontario. That's all that really should be discussed: Do we want to stall this, delay this? I think the opposition parties are basically saying, "Yes, we want to help farmers, but not right now. We want to talk some more." Let's bring it to committee, get the work done to iron it out, make amendments, make some changes and get out there and help farmers.

Why they want to delay and stall is something they're going to have to explain. I just want to hear the explanation of why they think they should stall this urgent bill to help farmers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to rise to add some question and comments to the member from St. Catharines, although to be frank, it's really hard to talk about Bill 40 when in his six minutes, he didn't actually speak to the bill. He spoke to why it needed to be moved forward. He gave examples of other bills that he would rather bring forward and debate. I think it's important for the viewers to understand that it is in fact the deputy House leader who chose which bill we were debating this morning. If he felt it was critically important for us to debate other pieces of legislation which are also on the order paper, he had every right and ability to bring those forward for debate instead of Bill 40. We are speaking about Bill 40 because the government put it on the order for speaking this morning.

There are issues that need to be dealt with. It is not a perfect bill. I know that's hard for the Liberals to understand, but they actually didn't draft a perfect bill. Part of our responsibility as legislators—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Newmarket—Aurora, I see you.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thanks, Speaker. As we—my train of thought there was dropped for a minute.

As difficult as it is for the Liberals to understand, they often don't draft perfect bills. Part of our responsibility in the opposition is to highlight those inequities, to highlight those items in the bill that are missing. I believe we are doing that in an effective way. Many of our members have talked about specific issues in their riding that would not be covered under Bill 40. I trust that that debate will continue.

As I say, it's not a perfect bill, so we have every right to debate it and add our voices to the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The minister has two minutes.

Hon. James J. Bradley: It is highly unusual, may I say, that this debate was not concluded on this occasion. Yesterday and today, normally following the practices of this House, debate would have ended on this bill. To see this bill continuing at the present time is really, really surprising to me because all of us in this House agree on this bill. This isn't one that's contentious. I can understand when there's disagreement taking place. But here we have a bill to which members have spoken, and all of us agree. Yet we have the debate continuing in this House after 12 hours and after 80 members have participated in one way or another, with other important legislation being there.

I could understand if it were contentious. I really do understand that. Having seen contentious bills over the years, it's good to have more views canvassed. But I am extremely surprised that this debate has not concluded second reading and is not now going to committee.

To the member, Ms. Jones, who mentioned that I had not dealt with the bill: In fact, in the early part of my speech I dealt exactly with the major provisions of this piece of legislation, which we all agree with.

I can only come to the conclusion that the purpose of this is now simply to thwart the agenda of the govern-

ment. I understand that; I've been in opposition. But to pretend that there's a compelling reason for further debate at second reading on this bill is certainly surprising to me.

What it does as well is, it starts to compel governments to begin with time allocation as opposed to allowing the free flow of debate. If that's what the opposition wants, that's a consequence of the kind of unnecessary delay that I see today.

0940

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I have a very high personal regard for the member for St. Catharines, the Chair of Cabinet and the deputy House leader. He has served here with distinction since 1977. He's a long-serving member. But I have to say that I disagree with him on this.

I remember, in the early days of the Harris government in 1995, the introduction of Bill 26. The opposition of the day was the Liberal Party and the New Democrats, and the Liberal Party in opposition was so incensed with Bill 26 and so violently opposed to it that they actually found a way, through the standing orders, to stop a vote in the middle of the vote. There was a member of the Legislature who sat right along here somewhere, who sat in the House for more than 24 hours to prevent the vote from continuing on a bill that the Liberal Party was violently opposed to.

In retrospect, that bill did need public hearings; that was what the Liberal Party and the opposition wanted. There were weeks of public hearings that followed what happened in the House that day, and there were a significant number of amendments to the bill.

Again, I would concur with the member for St. Catharines that this bill does need to go to committee, but, at the same time, for them to suggest that the bill doesn't need debate—I would totally disagree.

We see with this bill, I think, a division in the House—even though we support the principle of the bill, and I think all three parties are going to support it—but the way that this bill is being handled, we see a division in the House.

Why is that? Again, I think, more and more in my riding, we hear people talking about the rural-urban divide. On this side of the House, the vast majority of MPPs in our caucus represent small-town and rural ridings. We have agriculture as a huge, important, economic industry in our ridings.

The government members, by and large, represent urban and suburban ridings. I think most of them should understand the importance of agriculture to their ridings in terms of the food that we produce in rural Ontario, that they consume in their ridings. They should understand that. The old saying, "If you ate today, thank a farmer," maybe needs to be brought up again.

The fact is that we have not had any agriculture debates on bills since the election—the election being last June. Here we are now in March, not quite a year later, and I believe this is the very first piece of legislation that

the government has introduced that is related to agriculture. When we have debate on agriculture and agribusiness, we have a chance to talk about not just the bill, but of course the issue as it affects our riding and some of the general issues affecting agriculture in the province.

We have other ways of bringing those issues up, whether it's opposition day motions, perhaps, or whether it's through petitions, or whether it's letters that we send to the minister or—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There are a few discussions going on. I'd like to remind the minister, when he crosses the floor, to acknowledge the Chair. Is the minister listening? The minister can hear the Speaker? Hello? Thank you. It's a little loud—he's right beside me and I'm having trouble. There are a few sidebars going on. Take it outside, please.

Go ahead.

Mr. Ted Arnott: The fact is that we have lots of issues pertaining to agriculture in our ridings that those of us on the opposition benches would like to raise, and I only have 10 minutes to talk about them.

In my riding, in fact, in the county of Wellington, we are the third-largest milk producer in the province. We are the third-largest beef producer in the province in terms of number of cattle. We are the fourth-largest hog producer in the province. We are a significant producer of grain corn in comparison to other counties across the province. We are the second-largest producer of mixed grain, county by county, across the province. We are the second-largest sheep producer in the province of Ontario, in Wellington county.

I'm privileged to share the representation of Wellington county with the member for Perth-Wellington, and I know that he's looking forward and hopeful to have the chance to debate this bill as well. He's in committee today—there's a committee that's meeting concurrently with the House—but I'm sure that he would hope to have a chance to speak to this bill as well to talk about the importance of agriculture in his community.

I know that the farmers in our ridings would expect us to bring forward their ideas, their concerns, their aspirations, their hopes and their challenges when there is a debate on agriculture. I also know that they would hope that this bill would pass in some form—hopefully, getting it right in due course.

I think most farmers in my riding, and certainly the representatives from the commodity groups as well as the general farm organizations, recognize that there is a legislative process, that we debate issues and we discuss issues here; that there's a committee process whereby public hearings are possible and people can come in and talk about the bill and offer suggestions for improvements; and that we all will have that opportunity in due course.

In my riding, during the last provincial election, I talked about agriculture as an important responsibility of government. I recognize the hugely positive impact of agriculture and agribusiness in the Ontario economy. We

see, in terms of primary agriculture on the farm, \$13.7 billion in terms of an agricultural contribution to Ontario's annual GDP. We see 158,000 jobs generated by the farm sector across the province; \$8.1 billion in wages and salaries supported by Ontario's farm families; \$12 billion spent on farm inputs, with 58% of those jobs actually being in rural areas; and \$1.4 billion in provincial tax revenue.

This is a very, very important segment of Ontario's economy, and I think we need to repeat those numbers, to continue to remind everybody in this place of how important the agriculture sector is in terms of the overall economy of the province of Ontario.

More than 70% of Ontario farm products remain within the province. Some \$21.3 billion is the annual contribution of the food-and-beverage processor part of the industry to Ontario's GDP in 2012. We need to know, I think, and be reminded that food processing directly employs more than 91,000 workers across Ontario—and more than 193,000 secondary jobs in other areas of the economy. It's vastly important to the overall economy of the province of the Ontario.

I also want to again reiterate my support for supply management. I know that that has been brought up a couple of times during the course of this debate, and questions have been raised about the support that some people might have for supply management. I have never once wavered, in 25 years in the Legislature, in my support of supply management, and I will support it as long as I breathe.

From time to time, the Liberal Party has tried to make suggestions and cast aspersions on the support of supply management on the Conservative side of the House. I wish they would stop doing that, because they're playing a silly political game that is beneath them.

I think that we need to continue to find ways to reduce red tape in the province of Ontario, in terms of agriculture, and I talked about that during the election. I think we need to continue to find ways to enhance business risk management programs. I know that we've got some good programs in that respect, but we need to strengthen them and improve them. From time to time, we hear from farmers that the programs are not working for them, and we've got to work on that.

These are things that should be added, in my opinion, to agriculture legislation in the province of Ontario.

I strongly support research into agriculture and will continue to do so, because that's the future of agriculture for our province and for our young farmers coming forward. I think we need to continue to review ways to ensure that we have fair assessment of farm values, and that's an issue that has been a concern in my riding. Also, we need to take steps to preserve good-quality farmland, because that is the future of agriculture.

I also believe that if we preserve the future of agriculture, and we give young people a sense of hope that the agriculture industry is going to be a great opportunity going forward in the next decade—in the next millennium, Mr. Speaker—that will encourage young people. If

we preserve the family farm, they will, in turn, preserve our best-quality farmland.

Again, Mr. Speaker, with respect to Bill 40, we say that Ontario is currently the only province without the legislative authority to offer plans for a broad range of agriculture products, and Bill 40 is intended to address that issue.

In Ontario, we know that production insurance is delivered by Agricorp, a crown agent, and of course, Agricorp is based in Guelph, which is a community very close to my riding. In fact, my riding surrounds it on all sides, and I have a significant number of constituents who actually work there. They're good people, and they do a great job on behalf of our farmers in the province of Ontario.

Our farmers have long requested production insurance plans that move beyond just crops to include insurance for additional agricultural products. Bill 40, I gather, is an effort to address that concern, and we're pleased that it has been brought forward. Currently, we know that Ontario has available production insurance for almost 90 commercially grown crops, including grains and oilseeds, corn, soy, wheat, tree fruits, grapes, vegetables, specialty crops and forage.

0950

Mr. Speaker, again, I conclude—I only had 10 minutes to talk. Unfortunately, I spent about the first five minutes of my speech talking about the way the government is managing this bill in the House and my concerns about that. But I would again express support on second reading for the principle of this bill, and my hope that the bill, in due course, after the members have had an opportunity to debate the bill and discuss the issues—especially with respect to their ridings—that in fact this bill will move forward in the legislative process.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always a pleasure to speak in this House, particularly on an agriculture issue, and to follow the member from Wellington-Halton Hills. I always enjoy listening to his comments because he's thoughtful, talks about his riding and talks about what's important to the issue at hand.

What's most important to the issue at hand here is—we hear from the other side that this bill is being delayed. But actually, this bill should have been proposed in 2003. This government has been delaying it. A majority government for most of that time, a Liberal government, has been sitting on its hands while the other provinces moved ahead. They've been sitting on their hands for a decade, and now they're worried if it takes another half-hour or an hour. Really, it's the decade that's the problem.

What is a big issue with this bill—and we've brought it up several times, and it's the crucial part of this bill: There is no money attached. To increase the coverage to more products: great idea. But the way it works, the farmer pays 40%; the province, 26%; and the feds, 34%. Unless it's identified where that 26% is going to come from, and since we don't see any new money coming

down the pipe, if more products are covered, that means that the government is going to take money out of some other pot. And if it's the agricultural-risk-management pot, then that's a direct loss to farmers. That's not beyond the pale, because when the risk management program was developed—it's a very good program, but it needed about \$200 million to work financially, to balance, and what this government did is, they capped it at \$100 million. Farmers know very well that this government can and will actually take money from one pot and put it in another pot, and make it look like it's a net gain when actually it's a net loss. That's why it's so important we discuss this bill and home in on where the money is coming from.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Hon. James J. Bradley: If members of this House want to know why governments bring in time allocation motions, it's because of what we have witnessed in this House for the last two sessions. When normally the time for the legislation passing on second reading would have passed, normally it would have been approved, and it is not. So don't be surprised when you get time allocation motions when this happens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments? The member from—

Mr. Jack MacLaren: Carleton-Mississippi Mills.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Carleton-Mississippi Mills; sorry.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: It's a pleasure to speak to this bill. It's unfortunate that there are those who would choose to thwart the democratic opportunity to debate this bill to its full potential, as many of us would like to do.

Beyond that, I would say that this bill is a very good bill; great idea. It's going to do something that needs to have been done for a considerable length of time. That was pointed out by the member for Timiskaming-Cochrane.

The year 2003 created an incident where there was a great need to provide the kind of coverage, protection, endorsement and support of farmers in Ontario that was provided by all the other provinces of Canada. So we have a great lack over the last 10 years or even 12 years of addressing a problem that is 12 years old. That was mad cow disease, when government chose—because of one cow—to close the American border—to tell the world about the one cow, which resulted in the closing of the American border, which was 50% of the exports of beef cattle from Canada.

Overnight, cows went from being worth 60 cents a pound to as little as two cents a pound, which covered less than the trucking and the auctioning costs of the cow. It literally became more economical for the farmer to take the cow out behind the barn and shoot it and bury it in the manure pile than ship it to market. That was good food that had no value because of a government decision to so-called protect people from a problem that didn't exist, because never has anybody in Canada ever gotten sick

from or died from eating Canadian beef that had mad cow disease. So it was a problem that didn't exist that cost billions of dollars. This legislation will help fix that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I think the point has been made by my colleague from Timiskaming-Cochrane about the dollars part.

I just want to say that for the member from St. Catharines to get up in this House and say, "Oh, my God, we've talked about this too long and we should move things along"—first of all, New Democrats have pretty well finished debating this bill, so let's put that on the record.

The bigger thing is, I remember that the member for St. Catharines, when we had rules in this House that you could speak without limit, would take the floor for two or three days on a regular occasion. I sat exactly in the seat you sit in now, and I remember the member—because the opposition of the day had a strategy that they were trying to hold the government to account on either a budget or on a particular matter that they were rightfully worried about. I remember the member for St. Catharines grabbing the floor for more than a day at a time on more than one occasion. And you know what? That was perfectly within his rights, because the rules of the day allowed members to speak and there was no limit to how long they could speak.

In the opposition at that day, which was a Liberal opposition under Lyn McLeod—or it might have been Bob Nixon; I can't remember what particular time it was—the member used the floor in order to hold the government to account and put points on the record in regard to what was important to him and to others in this province, not only his own caucus, when it came to the issue at hand. You know what? That's democracy. I didn't like it as a government member. I know that the member from Wellington-Halton Hills would have been here at the same time, and he would remember the same thing, where the member did that.

I also remember at times some of your caucus doing the same. I remember—I don't remember the riding—Mr. Stockwell doing the same thing. I forget what budget bill it was. I remember the leader of the third party, Mr. Harris, reading into the record the names of every lake and river in the province of Ontario. They used the rules in order to hold the government to account. That's what it was all about, so we shouldn't take it personally.

Democracy is about checks and balances. At the end, the government always gets its way, and that's the way the system works, but the opposition has the right to be able to express concern.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Wellington-Halton Hills has two minutes.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the members for Timiskaming-Cochrane, St. Catharines, Carleton-Mississippi Mills and Timmins-James Bay.

The member for St. Catharines, in his brief response, alluded to the responsibility of government to get its

legislation through the House, but I would again suggest to him that the opposition has a responsibility to draw attention to the flaws and drawbacks of government policy, generally speaking, and to ensure that there is thorough and adequate debate.

There is another mechanism, and the member for St. Catharines definitely alluded to it, to terminate debate in the House, and that is through time allocation motions, for some reason more recently. In fact, the government has used that mechanism on a number of occasions, especially in the minority Parliament prior to the election, and now has chosen strategically to move to this other way of terminating debate, shutting down the opposition through motions to close off debate.

I think back to 1957, when the majority Liberal government of Louis St. Laurent in Ottawa was bringing in the pipeline bill. When they brought in a closure motion to shut off the debate from the CCF members as well as the Conservative members in opposition at that time, it caused such a sensation across the country that parliamentary democracy was being usurped by an overly arrogant Liberal government, in this case, shutting down debate, shutting down the voice of the people, in many cases, through the parliamentary process, that it actually led to an election and then in turn to the defeat of the Liberal government. Of course, not too many people study history anymore in Canada, but it's something to think about. If government goes too far and it shuts down the will of the people through opposition debate, it can sow the seeds, certainly, of significant political change when an election comes. Again, I bring that up.

Thank you very much for listening to my comments on Bill 40 this morning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: It occurs to me that I too have not had my say on Bill 40, so I'd like to do that. I'd like to just talk about how this province, and certainly this government, is committed to helping our agri-food partners manage risk. These are some of the things that I know, in the times that I was out in Perth county visiting our dairy farmers, our hog farmers and our chicken farmers—they they told me at the time.

It's very important that we move forward with this bill. We've got to get it to committee because this bill has to get working for our farmers.

I understand the reason that people want to talk about it in here. We all know that we're going to support it once it gets through committee, and we're going to support it when it gets back in here at third reading.

This is a bill that talks about how we help farmers cope with weather, disease, extreme market fluctuations such as what we're seeing now in the up and down of the Canadian dollar. This product insurance makes timely payments to producers and, most importantly for producers, it eliminates the need for ad hoc, costly band-aid responses to adverse conditions in the climate or in markets.

At the moment, Ontario's current inability to offer production insurance plans for commodities beyond crops

and perennial plants represents, particularly for farmers, a very significant gap. When producers suffer losses and they don't have production insurance coverage, they may actually have to come to the province for either direct or ad hoc assistance. They don't want to do that, and we don't want to do that.

This is the kind of bill that, if passed, will help our farmers better manage risk and encourage greater innovation, job creation and growth in the agri-food sector.

Speaker, as you know, this very important piece of legislation was introduced in November 2014. The bill has continued past the point of six and a half hours of debate, so that more members would have an opportunity to present their views. The bill has now seen well more than 10 hours of debate, and I understand that more than 80 members have either spoken—

Mr. Steve Clark: Bill 31 had 13 hours.

Interjection.

Mr. Steve Clark: I got carried away.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Again, the member from Leeds—Grenville will cut it back quite a bit.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'm just trying to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I don't know what you were trying to do. Regardless—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'm talking; you're listening. Thank you. So cut it back. Thank you.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm really surprised at my colleague from Leeds—Grenville. He knows that as a goal-tender I'm just impervious to this kind of heckling. I don't understand what would motivate him to try, but if he wishes, he's welcome to do it.

Mr. Steve Clark: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Point of order, member from Leeds—Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Point of order: He can stick to the bill rather than talking about me.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Listen, I know this is almost like school and I may have to call people out to the principal's office if they continue with this bantering. So, please, cut it back and no more comments about hockey and other things. Let's stick to the bill. Thanks.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Oh, another voice is heard from. Thank you very much.

Go ahead.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Well, Speaker, then let's just get right to the point. Given the number of members who have spoken to the bill, given the hours that it's debated, I move that the question now be put.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Mississauga—Streetsville moves that the question now be put.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Listen, there's a lot of pressure on the little old Speaker here, so I'm going to take a five-minute recess and discuss with the Clerks' table and the powers that be where we're going to go with this.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Who's the powers that be?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The powers that be? You'll find out.

The House recessed from 1004 to 1009.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): After in-depth debate, and advice that I have taken through past procedures—for example, Bill 31, which has been mentioned by the opposition, was debated for 14 hours, and Speaker Nicholls moved closure on that. I personally have ordered closure at 10 hours and 10 minutes on the government's anti-SLAPP legislation. These are just some of many, many other examples of varying hours of debate that I've had to kind of have a mean position on, in the middle of the road.

Mr. Delaney has moved that the question be now put. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear noes.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it.

This will be voted on after question period.

Vote deferred.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Orders of the day.

MAKING HEALTHIER CHOICES ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 POUR DES CHOIX PLUS SAINS

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 3, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 45, An Act to enhance public health by enacting the Healthy Menu Choices Act, 2015 and the Electronic Cigarettes Act, 2015 and by amending the Smoke-Free Ontario Act / Projet de loi 45, Loi visant à améliorer la santé publique par l'édiction de la Loi de 2015 pour des choix santé dans les menus et de la Loi de 2015 sur les cigarettes électroniques et la modification de la Loi favorisant un Ontario sans fumée.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The last position on this was from the NDP. Further debate, please. The member from Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity. I recognize that my time may be limited.

This bill was addressed at length by my colleague the Ontario NDP's health critic, France Gélinas, a few days ago. I want to refer back to her comments because I think they're quite substantive and speak to the history and the prospects for this bill.

She was very pleased to have the opportunity to talk to this because this bill contains many bills that she, in the past, has put forward. The bill addresses three areas.

The first addresses the question of healthy menu choices. In effect, this will require those who are selling prepared food—food to go, fast food, nice restaurants—to inform people through menu labels as to what they're getting. This is an issue that Madame Gélinas had been

bringing forward since 2009. As much as it would have been a good thing to have passed her bill in its previous iterations, it's probably a good idea that it's incorporated into this one.

The second schedule in this bill deals with amendments to the Smoke-Free Ontario Act to ban flavoured tobacco. Again, this is an issue that she's been working on since 2008. It's 2015. There are a number of years there where this bill could have been enforced, Madame Gélinas's earlier private member's bill, and it would have had a positive impact on reducing the risk of cancer for people in Ontario. The government should have let that bill go forward years ago; unfortunately, it didn't. It's incorporating it into this bill. I guess once again one can say, "Better late than never," but frankly, Speaker, it should have been much earlier.

The third schedule talks about what are known as e-cigarettes, vaporizers or vapers—whichever one you want to call them—but basically brings regulation to e-cigarettes. Those are the three main sections of this bill.

Let's start looking at it in greater detail through menu labelling. The statistics to encourage menu labelling are rather stark. We face a different world than we did 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago, when more people cooked at home. People would go to grocery stores; they would buy food; they would be able to read nutrition labelling on the food that they purchased. People were able to make choices based on their interest and the nutritional information that was provided with the food.

When you look at food labelling in grocery stores, you'll see labelling that tries to appeal to people's health consciousness. A lot of brands will talk about having zero cholesterol, zero calories. I don't know whether you actually get zero calories; maybe with club soda. Who knows? But the simple packaging of food, the attractive label on the cover, is also matched with information on the package about exactly how many calories you're taking in when you consume that food and what other nutritional factors are to be considered.

Mr. Speaker, I sense from subtle indications on your part that I may be running short on time. I appreciate the opportunity to start my address, and I thank you. I know that you'll recess, and I'll have an opportunity to continue at a later point.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): I'd like to thank the member from Toronto—Danforth. Obviously, with time restraints, we will continue where we left off with him.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): As it's now 10:15, this House stands recessed until 10:30 this morning.

The House recessed from 1015 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Steve Clark: I just want to introduce a fine upcoming business in my riding in the beautiful town of

Gananoque. In the gallery is Bruce Davis, the owner of the Gananoque Brewing Co. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's my pleasure to introduce, in the gallery today, three members from the University of Windsor Faculty Association: Debbie Noble, Pierre Boulos and my buddy Brian Brown. Also joining us today, from King's University College Faculty Association, is Claude Olivier. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Michael Coteau: It's my pleasure today to welcome Verle Thompson, Motion, and none other than Mr. Cardinal Offishall, the great Canadian international artist, here joining us today.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I have a couple of different groups: first of all, my good friends Edward and Carol Vitunski and their son Ed Vitunski, who are here from North Bay—welcome; and also Todd Horton, who is here from the Nipissing University Faculty Association.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I, too, want to welcome Carol and Ed Vitunski to the Legislature this morning. Not only are they from North Bay, but they are the parents of my senior communications adviser, Aly Vitunski, who is with them here at Queen's Park today.

Mr. Robert Bailey: It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce some members of the Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce, this being Sarnia–Lambton Day: Rob Taylor, Rory Ring, Monica Shepley, Debbie Harsen, Dave Ferguson, Dave Moody, Dean Edwardson, Don Wood, Jim Bradshaw, Jim Janssens, Jonathan Holmes, Keith Stevens, Ken Faulkner, Leo Stathakis, Lianne Birkbeck, Mark Lumley, Marty Raaymakers, Murray McLaughlin, Peter Hungerford, Rick Perdeaux, Shauna Carr, Spencer Dickson. Also, Don McGugan, the mayor of Brooke-Alvinston, is here with us, and Cindy Scholten, Sarnia city councillor.

Everyone is welcome to Sarnia–Lambton Day today.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I hope everyone will join me in welcoming three guests from the universities in Waterloo who are here today as part of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations lobby day. From the University of Waterloo Faculty Association, Jasmin Habib and David Porreca, and from Wilfrid Laurier University Faculty Association, Robert Kristofferson.

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: I'd like to welcome page captain Niko Hooegeveen's family: mother Dr. Kelly Emerson Hooegeveen, father Dr. Paul Hooegeveen, sister Hanna Hooegeveen, grandmother Ann Hooegeveen and grandfather Harry Hooegeveen.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'd like to introduce Larry Savage, my good friend from Niagara. He's a professor at Brock University. Welcome.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a great pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to welcome members from the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations visiting the House today. Actually, they have a lobby day today, and I invite all members of this House to visit them in rooms 228 and 230 this afternoon.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'd like members of the assembly to join me in welcoming Laura Parker from the McMaster University Faculty Association. She's here today to watch question period as part of the group that's here.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I'd like to welcome Diane Beauchemin from the Queen's University Faculty Association. Welcome.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I am delighted to introduce Alison Hearn and Kristin Hoffmann. They're from the Western faculty association in the great riding of London North Centre, and they're here with OCUFA.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to introduce three individuals from the Ontario Hospital Association's northern leadership council. Welcome to Queen's Park. We have Ray Hunt, who's the CEO of Espanola Regional Hospital and Health Centre; Allan Katz, CEO of Riverside Health Care Facilities; and Derek Graham, CEO of Manitoulin Health Centre and a board member of the Ontario Hospital Association.

I'd be remiss if I didn't also point out Bruce Davis, who wears many hats, among which is his involvement with the Ontario Film Review Board, the president of Gananoque Brewing Co. and my former campaign manager.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'd like to welcome somebody who I think will be arriving shortly, a visitor from Lambton–Kent–Middlesex, Mike Radan. Mike has been very actively involved in the community there for many years but he's also the father of my staff member Mackenzie Radan. Welcome to both for question period.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): With us in the Speaker's gallery today is a friend and a professional firefighter, Gavin Jacklyn, along with his daughter, Grace Jacklyn, to learn about democracy in action. We're glad you're here with us.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. Since we don't seem to be getting any answers from you in this House regarding the Sudbury bribery scandal, and you apparently are having scheduling problems trying to meet with the OPP, may we suggest that the best use of your time in the next hour would be to leave question period and go meet with the OPP? Will you do that, Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I understand that the member opposite is now going to take a facetious tack. I actually take this very seriously.

The fact is that that meeting is—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please—stop the clock. A quick announcement: I'll be jumping quite quickly on all of the interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The fact is that that meeting is being set up. I've said all along that I will co-operate with the authorities; we are co-operating with authorities. That meeting is being arranged.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Premier: Premier, you met with the Chief Electoral Officer sometime between January 26 and February 3 in relation to the investigation he started in mid-December into the Sudbury by-election. On February 9, you told reporters that you would be meeting with the OPP in relation to the investigation they restarted on January 16, and you just reiterated that right now. Yet, here we are nine weeks later, and your so-called scheduling issues are holding up the meeting.

Premier, wouldn't you agree that delaying a meeting with the OPP for over two months is tantamount to interfering in the Sudbury investigation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm not delaying anything. We are in the process of setting up that meeting. The member opposite can twist this any way he chooses, but the fact is the meeting is being set up. We're in the process of organizing that—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: It's not just about my calendar; there are other factors. I will have that meeting when it's arranged.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Premier. Premier, when you were chosen as Liberal leader, you loved to talk about how different you were going to be from your predecessor Dalton McGuinty.

Premier, the OPP investigation into the gas plant scandal started in June 2013, yet Dalton McGuinty didn't meet with the OPP investigators until April of the following year. So I ask you, Premier, will it take 10 months for you to meet with the OPP just like it took 10 months for Dalton McGuinty to meet with the OPP?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I was chosen as the leader, and then we went to an election and we won a general election. Then we won a by-election in Sudbury. I have a feeling that that's actually what this is about.

It's actually about the fact that we are implementing an agenda that we took to the people of Ontario. It's a positive agenda. It's building the province up. It's investing in the infrastructure and in the talent and skills of people that we know are necessary for the 21st century. That's not the platform that the party opposite ran on, and I think it's sticking in their craw.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

New question.

1040

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Premier. On February 9, the media reported that you and your deputy chief of staff were going to meet with OPP investigators regarding the alleged bribery allegations.

Premier, on exactly what date were you, your office or your lawyers contacted by the OPP to schedule that meeting?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I go again to the answer that I have been giving in this House and will continue to give. There is an investigation going on. Part of that investigation is the arrangement of meetings with a number of people. I don't have access to all that information. The authorities are doing that. They are talking to people; they're talking to the people to whom they choose to speak. They're setting up meetings as they choose to. We are working with them to set up one specific meeting between me and the authorities. We'll continue to make those arrangements.

But in the interim, there are other things happening, but we don't have access to those, because as I have said many times, this is an investigation that's happening outside the Legislature, not inside the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier: Again, it has been over five weeks since we learned that you were asked to meet with the OPP.

But, Speaker, tonight is the annual Liberal Party Heritage Dinner. Before anybody goes out to rush to buy a ticket, it's \$1,550 a ticket. My question is, Premier, why is a \$1,500-a-plate Liberal fundraiser more important to you than having a meeting with the OPP?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I know that this is the frame that the party opposite wants to put on the public discussion.

The party opposite is trying to construe the situation so that, somehow, I am avoiding meeting with the OPP. Mr. Speaker, that is tantamountly not true. It is not true. The meeting is being set up. I am working with the authorities. As soon as that arrangement can be made, I will have that meeting. That is the truth.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Final supplementary.

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Premier: Premier, the maximum punishment for bribery under the Election Act is two years less a day. The Criminal Code offence attracts a far stiffer penalty: A bribery conviction could mean up to 14 years in prison.

The Chief Electoral Officer can't lay charges. He can only pass his findings on to the Attorney General. Premier, is the reason you were so quick to meet with Elections Ontario but not with the OPP the fact that, if criminally convicted, your deputy chief of staff could be facing a lengthy prison term?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let's just be clear that in the same way that Elections Ontario organized a meeting with me—we worked with them, and we had that meeting—that's how we're working with the other authorities.

Let's just be clear on what the Chief Electoral Officer said. He clearly stated, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. The member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke will come to order and not discuss issues while the questions and answers are being put. The deputy House leader will not engage in the same conversation—and I don't need any coaching. That's the second time for both.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I had the meeting with Elections Ontario.

The Chief Electoral Officer said, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

Mr. Speaker, that investigation is ongoing, and I will meet with the OPP when that meeting is arranged.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs will come to order.

Hon. David Orazietti: It's the member from Miami Beach.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The tendency is to try to bring the temperature down. If that member wishes to identify anyone, they know that it's by their riding or their title only.

New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The Premier says she's working with the OPP, but she hasn't met with them. The Premier says there were no bribes offered to Andrew Olivier, but there are calls and warrants and independent reports that show evidence of bribes. The Premier insists she's answering questions. Sure, she stands up and talks, but she hasn't answered anything, Speaker.

Will the Premier start answering questions about her role in the Sudbury bribery scandal both in this House and with the OPP?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I will absolutely—first of all, I do answer the questions that the opposition asks of me and I will answer substantially when the question is appropriate to the place.

The fact is, there's an investigation going on. Members of the opposition and the third party want to direct that investigation themselves. The fact is that they are not the authorities to undertake that investigation. The authorities are outside of this Legislature and we will work with those authorities, as it should be, outside of the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: It's been five weeks since the Sudbury bribery scandal and four weeks of questions, but the Premier seems to believe that she's above answering questions either in this House or with the OPP. She doesn't seem to think that Ontarians deserve the respect of having the Premier give an honest answer to an honest question.

If the Premier won't meet with the OPP to answer their questions, then surely she must see the responsibility that she has to answer questions in this House, so I'm going to ask yet another one: Who gave the orders to Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The leader of the third party is absolutely inaccurate when she says that I will not meet with the OPP. That is just not the truth. I am going to meet with the OPP. That meeting is being set up. It hasn't happened yet, that's true, but it will happen and I will co-operate fully, as I have said I will do, with the investigation which is taking place outside of this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: The Liberal government is under the cloud of a bribery scandal, but there is something deeper than that. There is a question of transparency and integrity that's part of every action of this government. If the government refuses to answer questions about a criminal investigation, one that goes to the very heart of the Premier's very own inner circle of advisers, how can they be trusted with anything?

Is the Premier avoiding meeting the OPP in an effort to influence the timing of the charges being laid?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I am avoiding nothing. There is a meeting being set up. I will take part in that meeting. I have said that consistently. The fact is, the meeting hasn't been set up yet. There are many, many aspects to an investigation, but the fact is I don't know all of those. I don't know what else is going on in terms of the investigation, for a good reason, and that is that the investigation is taking place outside of this Legislature, not inside the Legislature. I will work with the authorities as part of that investigation.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. Political corruption, bribery, protecting insiders, refusing to answer basic questions, dirty deals and dodging the OPP investigators: Will the Premier commit to doing better and start by answering questions about her role in the Sudbury bribery scandal either in this House or in the OPP investigation room?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have said repeatedly that I will work with the authorities, I will answer the questions that I am asked. But for the leader of the third party to try to again construe this situation as somehow me avoiding having those conversations is just inaccurate. She's just not speaking the truth. The truth is, the meeting is being set up. I have committed to having that meeting and as soon as it's arranged, I will take part.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: There is something truly ridiculous when the Premier won't even tell Ontarians whether Pat Sorbara is attending cabinet meetings, claiming that she can't because there's an investigation ongoing by police—an investigation she is stalling and hampering by

refusing to be interviewed by investigators. The Premier must realize that this is absurd. Few, if any, citizens in this province would be able to dodge being questioned about a criminal offence for this long.

1050

Will the Premier stop dodging the OPP investigators, stop stalling this investigation and agree to meet with the OPP immediately?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you. Stop the clock.

While it is my task to listen carefully to the questions and answers—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): While it is my task to listen carefully to the questions and answers, I believe I did hear something said previously that should not have been said, so I'm going to ask the Premier to withdraw.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I withdraw.

Hon. James J. Bradley: After what she said over there?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): At any time, anyone wishes to challenge the Chair, the option is there.

Premier: answer.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, let me just repeat that I have every intention to meet with the authorities. That meeting is being set up. I would never want to stall or hinder the investigation. I have been clear that I will work with the authorities.

In terms of answering the questions that in this House are questions being asked by people who, I think, want the investigation to happen in here—I just want to refer back to the comments of the member for Timmins–James Bay. He was talking about me, but his principle applies to everyone. He said, on February 27, “You do have a larger responsibility to make sure you’re careful in the use of your words so you don’t interfere in any ... way.” I think that he’s right, and we need to pay attention to that on all sides of the House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, after five weeks, the Premier can’t seem to find a single hour to sit down with the OPP anti-rackets branch investigators. Though she—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Tell the truth. Tell the truth. Be honest.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Economic Development will come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Though she seems to have lots of time for the Liberal Heritage Dinner tonight, I have to wonder if Gerry Lougheed is going to be there, Speaker. Might I suggest to the Premier that she actually skip question period tomorrow and instead schedule a meeting with OPP investigators? It’s not as though she’s answering any questions here.

Would the Premier agree to stop stalling the investigation, skip question period tomorrow morning and allow the OPP investigators to do their job, sit down with them and start answering their questions?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have been very clear in this House, and with the people of Ontario in statements that I’ve made publicly, that I have every intention of meeting with the OPP when that meeting is set up. The meeting is being set up.

I actually think it does the people of Ontario a real disservice to characterize behaviour in such a way that suggests that we only do one thing at a time, that, in fact, I can’t co-operate with the authorities and still govern the province. That’s just not the case.

There is a lot of work that needs to be done, whether it is legislation that is going to make sure we invest in infrastructure, whether it’s legislation that puts in place an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan, whether it is making sure that on all fronts we are responding to emergencies, like the emergency in Gogama. There is a lot of work to be done, and, as government, we have to do a lot of things at the same time.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Premier. I noticed that you have been smiling and grinning through much of question period this morning, but I’m very concerned about the attitude demonstrated by you and your government.

You’re the first government that has been accused of breaching the Election Act, and you’re under four separate OPP investigations. But there’s more: We are seeing a disturbing level of abuse across all of your government, a complete disregard for ethics not just by you but by individuals across the public service who are following your example.

Premier, if you don’t demonstrate leadership, it will only get worse. Will you take a step in the right direction and meet with the OPP immediately?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: To the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I remind the member opposite again that there is an ongoing investigation, and it would be highly inappropriate for anybody to engage in any conjecture or presumptions here, as the case may be. The Premier has been very clear: She will co-operate with the authorities, and then we will do so.

I think what we need to really focus on are issues that are at hand. We know the agenda of the party opposite, which is to cut 100,000 hard-working Ontarians’ jobs. We know that they want to cut about 22,000 jobs just from teachers.

We need to make sure that we let the independent authorities do their work and focus on issues that are important to Ontarians. I ask all members to respect how our system works when it comes to independent police investigations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Randy Hillier: I see the House leader is grinning as well.

Back to the Premier. How about these for issues: our Ontario Provincial Police union, Ornge and a Ministry of Labour bureaucrat? When you fail to lead by example, others take note. Whether it's a failure of ministerial oversight or a bureaucrat under investigation for extortion and shakedowns, the buck stops with you. When you won't meet with the police over an ongoing investigation, you send a very clear message to everyone that you think you're above the law.

This needs to stop, and it needs to stop now. I can't imagine it getting worse, but it probably will. Premier, will you do your job? Will you lead by example, set a tone that your government is not above the law and meet with the OPP now?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I would argue that the Premier is leading by example because she is focusing on issues that are important to Ontarians and because she is investing and making sure that we are growing our economy all across the province. She is taking actions to ensure that we have good-paying jobs for hard-working Ontarians. She is investing in building our infrastructure, both public transit and other critical infrastructure.

That is how the Premier is leading, and we ask the members opposite to really focus on issues that are important to Ontarians on the mandate that was given to us by the people of Ontario in the election that happened just recently, almost a year ago.

Any investigation that is taking place outside this House, we should respect that process and let the police and other authorities do their work.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Deputy Premier, when were you first briefed about the plan to offer Andrew Olivier a job so he could get out of the way of Ms. Wynne appointing Mr. Thibeault as a candidate?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I can tell you that I was delighted to learn that the Premier had met with Mr. Thibeault and that he was indeed interested in leaving in the New Democratic Party and joining the Liberal Party, leaving the House of Commons to join the Ontario Legislature. I was thrilled, and the more I learned about that man, the happier I was and the more I knew he was making the right decision.

He is a man of enormous integrity. He has contributed to his community. Glenn Thibeault is already making a contribution. He was up in Gogama. He visited the site and was there representing the government at that disaster. He's a fine MPP, and he's going to get even better the more time he spends here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Back to the Deputy Premier: Seeing as the Deputy Premier seems to know the intimate details of the Premier's discussion with her soul, has she spoken with the OPP anti-racket investigation to share her version of the Sudbury bribery scandal?

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Hon. Deborah Matthews: I have not been invited to participate in such a conversation. If I were, I would be more than delighted to participate.

But I do want to really underline—because you asked the question about the decision of Glenn Thibeault to leave the New Democratic Party and join the Liberal Party. It must have been a difficult decision to make. I know it's difficult to tell your campaign team, tell your staff, tell your friends that you've made a decision, but he made that decision for all the right reasons. He made that decision because he knew that the Premier and this government were in tune with his values, his priorities. He knew that sitting on this side of the House and in this House he would make a contribution that would make the lives of people in Sudbury better.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: My question is one of interest and concern to all Ontarians, and it is for the minister responsible for women's issues. We know that one in three women will experience some form of sexual assault in her lifetime. We also know that 28% of women say they've been on the receiving end of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours or sexually charged talk in the workplace. This is not okay; in fact, it's never okay.

Last Friday, when our government released *It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment*, I was incredibly proud of the work of our Premier and our government on this issue. In fact, it took me back to 1992 when, while at the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, I had the incredible privilege of working with women across Canada on the development of the rape shield legislation.

I've heard very positive comments on our plan from my constituents in Burlington and our local women's shelter in particular. Speaker, through you, can the minister share some background on our plan for the benefit of this House?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I'm just so excited, and I want to thank the member from Burlington for the very important question, for her work on this important cause and for being appointed to the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment.

Our action plan is something that we're very proud of and deepens our commitment to ending sexual violence and harassment. We've committed \$41 million over the next three years to support the plan's implementation. It includes a public education campaign, a curriculum that develops a deeper learning about healthy relationships and consent. It includes a focus on stronger workplace safety legislation, an enhanced prosecution model and a focus on post-secondary education. There's so much more. These are not our first steps, Speaker, and won't be our last either.

Hearing the Premier say—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles:—that the problem of sexual violence and harassment is rooted in deeply held beliefs in women and men, power and equality, was very powerful—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I think this is about active—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When I say “Thank you,” you sit.

Supplementary?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'd like to thank the minister for her leadership on this issue.

As the Premier has referenced, recent incidents have brought this discussion from the sidelines into the spotlight once again. A lot of time has passed since the rape shield law, but clearly we have much more work to do.

Every day across this province in cities and towns, in boardrooms, on shop floors and university campuses, women are experiencing violence and harassment. Our commitment to eliminating harassment and violence is clear. We've increased funding to organizations and programs targeting violence by 63% since 2002. We grew those investments last year to \$145 million. Now the new investments to support the action plan will allow us to do even more.

Can the minister outline what concrete steps these new investments will achieve in helping to change attitudes, provide support to survivors and make workplaces and campuses safer and more responsive to complaints about sexual violence and harassment?

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: Thanks to the member for the supplementary question.

Speaker, the plan is very comprehensive. I'll just highlight a few of the key elements here: strengthening provisions on sexual violence and harassment in legislation; enhancing laws to strengthen enforcement; access to quality and timely care in hospital-based assault and domestic violence treatment centres; a public awareness campaign; a creative fund to provoke conversation and dialogue on consent, rape culture and gender equality; updated training for front-line workers; an enhanced prosecution model; legislation requiring universities and colleges to have sexual violence and harassment policies, including prevention and response protocols; stabilizing and increasing funding for assault centres; a pilot program to provide free, independent legal advice to survivors where cases are proceeding to a criminal trial; and establishing, of course, a permanent round table on sexual violence and harassment.

We're very excited about these initiatives, Speaker—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Premier, it's become apparent to everyone that despite your assertions otherwise, you have no intention of aiding the Ontario Provincial Police in their investigation into this Sudbury bribery scandal.

It has been more than five long weeks since the OPP made it known that they would like to speak with you regarding your involvement in this sordid affair. If you had nothing to do with this scandal, you would have been eager to speak with the police. You would have done it over five weeks ago.

Premier, are you stonewalling because you are the central player in this investigation and all the orders can be traced back to you?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'll be meeting with the OPP when that meeting is arranged. I've been very clear that I will work with the authorities. As I've said over and over again in this House, that meeting is being set up, and I will take part in it when it's arranged.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, I suppose I shouldn't be surprised by your reluctance to speak to the OPP or to answer questions, because we all know that dodging and ducking has become your MO.

I remember very well your questionable testimony to the gas plants committee.

Hon. Liz Sandals: Where did you get your information?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Education, come to order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The difference here is that you'd be answering questions directly—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me. Stop the clock. Right through my request for you to come to order, you continued speaking. Minister of Education, come to order.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Premier, the difference here is that you would be answering questions directly in front of the Ontario Provincial Police. You can't get your MPPs to shut them down.

Criminal investigations into breaches of the Election Act and bribery allegations will eventually hold everyone involved responsible. The OPP are not going away. We, the opposition, are not going away. Will you finally do the right thing, co-operate, meet with the police and, in the meantime, suspend Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: First of all, on this side of the House, we don't want the opposition to go away either. We want them to stay where they are. It suits them well.

Let me tell you, Speaker, what the Premier's strategy is. The Premier's strategy is simple: It's to serve the people of Ontario. She is doing so by working on issues that are important to Ontarians. That's what she ran on in the last election and that's what we received a majority mandate on: to focus on building Ontario up, making sure that we are investing in our infrastructure across the province, making sure that we have retirement income security for hard-working Ontarians.

There is a process that is going on outside of this Legislature. The Premier has been absolutely clear that she will co-operate and that all of those details are being

worked out. But what we need to focus on in this House is issues that are important to Ontarians. We should not interfere in an independent investigation, and I urge the members to please focus on issues.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Attorney General. When did the Attorney General learn about the plan to offer Andrew Olivier a job in order to get out of the Premier's way?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Monsieur Speaker, as you know, the process is very clear. I am not involved in all of this. Also, the election commissioner was very clear. He informed both parties—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: The commissioner informed both parties. So I'll say to the member that he should ask his House leader, because his House leader received a letter from the commissioner explaining the process and how my position is left out of this exercise.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Again to the Attorney General: The Attorney General was scheduled to speak at a Liberal campaign event in Sudbury, but she cancelled at the last minute. I can only imagine it's because she realized the optics were quite terrible.

For weeks, New Democrats have called on the Attorney General for assurances that the bribery investigation would be independent. It took weeks to get results. Has the Attorney General spoken to the OPP anti-racket investigators about her knowledge of the Sudbury bribery scandal?

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Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: As I explained in the House previously, the Attorney General is left out of this process and this was explained very clearly by the election commissioner. I wanted to make sure that I protected the integrity of the position, so that's why I stayed out of the exercise. And yes, I didn't go to Sudbury because I wanted to make sure that I respected my position. I respect the integrity of the position.

GOVERNMENT ASSETS

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's unfortunate that the opposition haven't been asking any questions about government policy today. It's unfortunate they're not focused on the priorities of Ontarians. However, on behalf of the residents of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, I do have a question for the Minister of Energy on the recent news regarding Hydro One.

Minister, the government has asked Ed Clark to conduct a review of government assets in order to increase investments in—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Put your question, please.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There were reports yesterday that the government is considering issuing an initial public offering for Hydro One. Minister, could you please inform this House on the validity of these reports and what the government is planning on doing in regard to asset review and, more specifically, Hydro One?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I'd like to thank the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for this relevant question regarding government policy. This is a very important and very topical issue, and I'm glad the member is taking the opportunity to ask it.

The Premier's Advisory Council on Government Assets has yet to provide its final recommendations to the government, and at this time it would be premature to suggest any decisions have been made. Let me be clear: none have.

Despite what the NDP says, we asked the council to retain the government's long-term ownership of OPG, Hydro One and the LCBO. We need to find ways to generate revenue so that Ontario can invest in its long-term energy needs, build badly needed highways, schools, hospitals and transit, and invest in important projects like the Ring of Fire. We look forward to receiving the council's recommendations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: Thank you, Minister, for that very detailed response. Investing in infrastructure is very important to the people of Etobicoke–Lakeshore and all residents of Ontario. They rely on our roads, our public transit and our hydro system in order to be able to go about their daily lives. I'm happy to hear that the government will await the final recommendation of Ed Clark's panel before making any decisions.

When it comes to Hydro One, it's important that the government maintain ownership of the asset. It's also important that whatever decision is made respecting Hydro One doesn't negatively impact the ratepayers.

Minister, could you please inform this House on how the government—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: —is ensuring that the needs are met of both of these very important objectives when it comes to the review of our energy assets?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member again. The member is correct when he says that investing in infrastructure is important to people, not only in his riding but across the province. This is about improving people's quality of life, improving opportunities for the people of Ontario and building our economy. Whether it's a new highway that lets you get home faster from work or a new project that will bring jobs to a community, this is about making Ontarians' lives better, and that's our priority.

The people of Ontario can also be sure of two things: First, Ontario would always retain an important ownership stake in an asset as vital and strategic as Hydro One;

and second, rates in Ontario are and will continue to be set by the Ontario Energy Board.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good morning. My question is for the Premier. It's been over five weeks since the OPP wanted to sit down with you. That's five weeks where Pat Sorbara has had full access to your office.

Let's put this in comparison to your gas plants scandal.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: From the time your transition team leader—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I did ask for order and some people just talked right through it. I find that personally insulting.

Carry on, please.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: From the time your transition team leader met with the secretary of cabinet to the time the deputy chief of staff's partner wiped hard drives in the Premier's office—well, that was just 16 days. That was plenty of time to tie up loose ends, wasn't it?

Premier, what assurance can you give us that this Deputy Premier isn't tying up loose ends that may form part of the OPP investigation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, clearly we see that the members opposite are engaging in conjecture and speculative hypotheses here. I think we really should do the right thing and let the authorities do their work. There's a reason that we have a system in place, that these types of investigations are separate and apart from the government, and I think we should respect that process in order to make sure that they are done appropriately and in a valid fashion.

We even received the same advice, actually, from both the member from Leeds—Grenville and the member from Timmins—James Bay. They keep telling the Premier, "Don't interfere in this police investigation." I think they're giving good advice. We should respect that and really focus on issues that are important to Ontarians, which really is making sure that we're building Ontario up.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Again to the Premier: I'm sorry, but you don't get the benefit of the doubt here. Let me remind you, it was your signature on the original gas plant cabinet document that started the whole scandal. Now we see Beckie Codd-Downey, who is shown in the OPP warrant to be deleting her emails, still working in your office. Leon Korbear had his computer added to the list to be wiped, and he's still advising you. And now Pat Sorbara, under criminal investigation, has had run of your office for five weeks.

Premier, is the reason you haven't agreed to meet with the OPP simply to give your staffers enough time to bury the bodies from Sudbury?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I think the smear campaign that the opposition is engaging in is beneath them. The people they're naming are hard-working servants of the public. They work day in and day out to serve the people of Ontario and this government. We should respect them and we should thank them.

What we need to ensure is that we continue to focus on what's important to Ontarians. Clearly what the opposition is doing is scandalmongering and not focusing on the issues because they have nothing to add to that debate, because they have washed their hands of anything meaningful, because their idea of public policy is to fire 100,000 hard-working public servants. We reject that notion, Speaker. Even Ontarians rejected that notion in the last election.

Let's let the independent authorities do their work, let's respect the work that they're doing and let's focus here on the job that was given to us by the people of Ontario, and that is to grow our economy and ensure that there is retirement income security—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Ted, Ted.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You're offering traffic cop duties that I don't want you to have.

New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. When was the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services first briefed about the plan to offer Andrew Olivier a job in order to get out of the Premier's way?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I very much appreciate the strategy the third party is engaging in because they really have no other strategy to talk about. They're having a really hard time justifying to themselves and their party members why they cannot win any more elections. They voted against one of the most progressive budgets in the history of this province. They took a gamble, and guess what? They got relegated back to the same spot they belong: in third place in this House.

They can't get out of their heads that they won the Sudbury seat, they went into a by-election and they lost that seat also to a very credible individual who moved from the NDP to the Liberal caucus.

There's a reason the people of Ontario have elected a Liberal majority government. It's because they believe in our values, they believe in things that we're focusing on: making sure that we're raising the minimum wage, making sure that we're raising the wages of personal support workers. We ask the NDP to support those important initiatives because that's what the people of Ontario want.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Has the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services been interviewed by the

OPP anti-racket investigators to share his version of the attempt to bribe Andrew Olivier?

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Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, I think the member opposite knows that when it comes to independent police—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. I need the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Energy to allow the minister to answer without interrupting.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Isn't that amazing? They heckle their own members.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew is warned.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. Minister, put your answer, please.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: As I was saying, as the member opposite knows, there is an independent investigation, and we respect that process. Really, Speaker, I think what we should be doing is focusing on issues that are important to them, to all of us.

This is the NDP which has lost any moral foundation to stand on when it comes to issues that are important to Ontarians.

This is what Martin Regg Cohn wrote last February: "Why is NDP leader Andrea Horwath doing the bare minimum on the minimum wage?"

"Anti-poverty activists and union leaders are wondering. And seething.

"I am profoundly disappointed that the NDP has not taken a public stand on this," said Sheila Block, of the non-partisan Wellesley Institute.

Speaker, that is one of the biggest challenges the NDP has got: They have lost their own supporters and they have nothing else to talk about, so they are engaging in scandalmongering.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

ACCÈS À LA JUSTICE

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: My question is for the Attorney General of Ontario. This question is important to me in both a personal as well as a parliamentary capacity, representing, as I do, Etobicoke North, a diverse riding.

It's unfortunate that the opposition hasn't been asking questions today that relate to government policies or are focused on priorities that matter. So my direct and earnest question is this: Will we ensure that the justice system remains equally available to every Ontarian from any and all socio-cultural backgrounds?

Madame la Procureure générale, nous devons nous assurer que le système de justice est accessible pour les Ontariens de tout milieu socioculturel.

The justice system can be complicated at times, and it matters to me and to my residents in Etobicoke North that every Ontarian, regardless of background, is respected.

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Je veux remercier le député d'Etobicoke-Nord pour sa question très intéressante. Pour nous, les Ontariens et Ontariennes s'attendent à ce que leurs valeurs soient respectées dans les initiatives de leur gouvernement. Le député a raison quand il affirme que la justice doit être assurée pour tous les Ontariens, indépendamment de leur origine culturelle.

Mon ministère a travaillé avec le Centre d'assistance juridique en matière de droits de la personne afin d'améliorer le processus de la fonction de juré. Des coordonnateurs de l'information sur l'accessibilité aux palais de justice sont disponibles en cas de besoin, et une formation supplémentaire est offerte pour assurer qu'ils soient prêts à accueillir toute personne ayant besoin d'assistance.

Notre gouvernement travaille avec ardeur pour répondre aux besoins changeants de la société multiculturelle ontarienne en fournissant un service d'interprétation dans toutes les langues. Lorsque requis, nous assurons que des interprètes qualifiés sont disponibles en cour.

Le Président (L'hon. Dave Levac): Merci. Question?

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: I feel grateful and privileged to be part of a government that allows me not only to pose such a question but also furnishes me with that answer, a government led by Premier Kathleen Wynne—especially Kathleen Wynne.

Speaker, I have to say, it is sad, remarkable, anachronistic and startling that in 2015, we still have to remind ourselves that diversity and religious freedoms should be respected everywhere. Ontario is an incredibly diverse province. Nearly 40% of Canada's immigrants settle here. It's important for people to know that their cultures and belief systems are honoured.

What are we doing as a government, at least here in the province of Ontario, to uphold this sacred trust?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Le ministre de la citoyenneté et de l'immigration.

Hon. Michael Chan: I'd also like to thank the honourable member from Etobicoke North for asking the question.

As an immigrant myself, I know first-hand how difficult it is to come to a new country, learn a new language and experience a new culture, and how important it is to feel welcomed.

From its earliest days, Ontario was built on immigration. With the exception of our aboriginal populations, we all come from somewhere else.

We know that diversity is one of our greatest assets. This is why in 2012 we introduced our immigration strategy which aims to attract newcomers, leverage diversity and help successfully transition immigrants.

As well, we are reintroducing the Ontario Immigration Act, Bill 49, which will allow us to have more control in our immigration system.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Norm Miller: My question is to the Premier. On the 11th of December, Gerry Lougheed was recorded as

saying to Andrew Olivier, "The Premier may stay with the nomination, she may go with an appointment, you don't know. I think you and her need to talk about it."

By all accounts, you spoke with Mr. Olivier that very night. Premier, if you were able to make room in your schedule so quickly to speak with Andrew Olivier, why has it been over five weeks and you still can't find time to meet with the OPP?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Speaker, let me just take another shot at this; I know the minister would like to chime in on the supplementary. Let me just say once again that I am committed to working with the authorities. There is a meeting being set up. I don't have access to all of the work that's being done as part of the investigation. I repeat: That's because the investigation is taking place outside of this House, not in the Legislature. That's as it should be. As soon as that meeting is arranged I will be there.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Norm Miller: Again to the Premier: Gerry Lougheed goes on to say to Andrew Olivier, "Then you need to say, 'So, why would Andrew Olivier be motivated to do this? What's in it for me? Politically, what's in it for me? In my long term, short term, is there an appointment, are you gonna let me head up a commission ... what are you giving me, for me to step down, that is worthwhile? Otherwise, guess what, I'm gonna go sell memberships and see what my chances are.'"

Premier, this pitch comes on December 11, weeks after you insist having appointed Glenn Thibeault as your candidate. How do you explain this discrepancy in timing in your version of events in the Sudbury bribery scandal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, I remind the members opposite that we have a basic principle of fundamental justice in our system and that is called presumption of innocence. I don't think anybody should be drawing any conclusion whatsoever.

I would be remiss if I did not remind the members opposite exactly what the Chief Electoral Officer said in his finding. He said, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

I remind members that they are neither prosecutors nor judges in this House. We should let the independent authorities, as always the case is, do their job. They are the most capable and trained to do that.

As the Premier has affirmed again and again, she will co-operate with the authorities.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My question this morning is to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. Good morning, Minister.

When was the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change first briefed about the plan to offer Andrew Olivier a job in order to get out of the Premier's way?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I can remember two great days in my life: One, when Premier Wynne told us who our candidate in Sudbury was going to be, someone I've known and have great regard for. And even better, when I found out that the MPP for Sudbury was going to be the parliamentary assistant with me.

The only person—the biggest rail safety issues of our time; we have terrible concerns in Gogama. The third party has the privilege of representing a lot of those folks. It is shameful that we haven't even had a question from them on Gogama. It is shameful we can count on one hand the number of questions on climate change. That's shameful.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

Mr. Paul Miller: It's shameful that you're the government.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek will come to order.

Supplementary?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change has a vested interest in whether his parliamentary assistant is embroiled in a bribery scandal. Did the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change ask his parliamentary assistant about that bribery scandal—what he knew, when he knew it—and did the minister relay any of that information to the investigators at the OPP anti-rackets squad?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I hope the Minister of Transportation will get a question soon, too, because he's very excited about that.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thank you so much. I appreciate that. I owe you.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, it's interesting to me, because the MPP from Sudbury talks to me about climate change. He talks to me about blue-green algae in Sudbury lake—very concerned about those things. The member for Windsor might be concerned about the condition of the Great Lakes, or climate change, or the fact that in 2012 we lost 80% of our apple crop—very important to farmers and people in southwestern Ontario.

The one thing that I'm confident of is, we now have the opposition only a government could love, Mr. Speaker: out of touch with people, off topic, missing every important point of the day and trying to bring what should be in the courts and in investigations inappropriately into this House. I encourage them to keep on this track, because, I can tell you, my aunt in Sudbury, who is 92 years old, who actually had some fondness for that party, has lost it all. She represents a lot of people—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. New question.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I say to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the Minister of Agriculture: I did not get quiet for you to heckle.

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Daiene Vernile: For a moment there, I was quite excited, because I thought we were going to actually get a different question.

My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines. It is somewhat disappointing that we have a great deal of important government policies before this House and we're not being asked about them. So let me ask you.

The Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada held their annual conference in Toronto. They welcomed close to 25,000 delegates from around the world.

We know that Ontario is a top jurisdiction in Canada for mineral production and exploration, and the effects of this industry are very important. They go way beyond northern Ontario. The mining sector is a remarkable contributor to our provincial economy.

At last week's event, our government was very busy promoting new mineral opportunities. Mr. Speaker, can the minister please tell us what our government is doing to ensure that we continue to attract investment in the mineral sector in Ontario?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Great question. Thank you so much to the member for Kitchener Centre.

Certainly, last week was a remarkable event—almost 25,000 people. I was very pleased to host the opening of Ontario's pavilion. It was a remarkable opportunity to meet with industry, First Nations, the Métis Nation and people from all around the globe.

We spoke about Ontario's Mineral Development Strategy, which was launched in 2006, which moved Ontario's mineral development agenda forward.

I'm very proud of the fact that, since that time, with the strategy, we put together a modernized Mining Act, a tax system that creates a very competitive investment climate, and clear consultation practices and meaningful collaboration.

We also recognize how important it is to renew that strategy, so last week, at the opening of the pavilion, I announced the renewal of Ontario's Mineral Development Strategy. This renewal is going to make us an even more positive investment climate all around the world.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you to the minister for his answer. It's clear that the minister is committed to making sure that the province continues to have a very comprehensive edge in the mineral sector and the most productive mineral sector in this nation.

National mining production and exploration stats for last year were published very recently, and the data shows again that Ontario has a lot to be proud of. In 2014, we saw the value of mineral production reach a record \$11 billion.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, this is a very important sector for us. So I'd like to ask the minister: How is he ensuring that ideas from industry experts, aboriginal communities and northerners are all being heard as our government plans its strategy?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you again to the member for Kitchener Centre, because it really is a great story. The \$11 billion in mineral production is a record, and obviously we continue to lead in terms of mineral exploration across the country. We've got new mines opening up. I wish I had more time to tell you about all the new mines that will be opening up both this year and next year, let alone the ones that have.

The mineral development strategy represents an extraordinarily important commitment from our government, obviously related to public engagement, the environment, and aboriginal communities, but, may I say, also maintaining, if not growing, a positive investment climate. It very much articulates, I think, our commitment to modern and progressive business practices, to ensure that continued sustainability and certainty that the industry is so keen to have.

We began workshops in northern Ontario. This week, it will be Kenora, Thunder Bay and a whole bunch of other communities. So 2015 is off to an exciting start. Great news in the mining—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Premier. As all members of this House are aware, your administration is currently under not one, not two, not three, but four police investigations. It's unprecedented. Yet your stated principle in these matters of misconduct, including the Sudbury bribery scandal, is that your staff have to be in jail before you remove them from your office.

Surely, everyone agrees that you need to clear the air and restore confidence so that your office can operate under absolute integrity. Premier, do you think your principle of protecting your backroom adviser and avoiding your interrogation by the OPP inspires confidence in the people of Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I remind the member opposite again that there is an independent investigation that is going in this matter. I can assure you that the Premier, the government and I have full confidence in our hard-working OPP officers. But we also respect their autonomy, and we urge all members not to interfere in an ongoing investigation. We've got a system that makes sure it is at arm's length from the government so there is no interference. That's the advice—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. The member from Lanark will come to order. The member from Leeds–Grenville will come to order.

The deputy House leader: Just as a note, when those two microphones are on, you seem to be very active, and when they're not on, it's not—so I'm going to advise the member to only talk when his microphone is on.

Carry on.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker. As you just reminded me, when you mentioned the member from Leeds–Grenville—because he actually said, and I agree with him when he said, that the Premier should “stop interfering in an ongoing investigation and let it run its course.” He’s absolutely right. I remind him, and through him, all his members as well, that they should take his advice and let the authorities do their work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Back to the Premier, Mr. Speaker. Premier, the integrity of your administration continues to be grossly compromised. I don’t know who is advising you on the matters of integrity, but I do know you want to put these matters behind you. You want to sweep them under the carpet.

The only way forward, Premier, is to (1) admit that your principle of “people have to be in jail” is unbecoming, and (2) ask Pat Sorbara and Gerry Loughheed to step aside during the police investigation. Will you do that, Premier?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Again, I remind the member opposite that we have a very strong principle of fundamental justice in our system of democracy, and that’s called the presumption of innocence. A person is presumed innocent until proven guilty. I remind the members opposite again that in this matter, these are mere allegations. There is not even a criminal charge laid in this matter whatsoever. So we should let the independent authorities do their investigation.

I think, really, what’s at the heart of all of these lines of questioning is the official opposition’s desire to sweep under the carpet their—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, come to order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Speaker. What the members opposite are trying to do is sweep under the carpet their commitment to cut 100,000 public service jobs. You know, they still haven’t denounced what they stood for. Clearly, the people of Ontario sent a clear message: They want a government that will build Ontario up.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Why is it that you’re able to schedule an interview with the Chief Electoral Officer so quickly, and you’re having so much of a problem trying to find time to meet with the OPP investigation squad?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —that question many times. I will meet with the OPP when that meeting is set up.

1140

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Premier, we have suggested that there are a number of times that you could do it. For ex-

ample, our Premier—the future Premier, I should say—our leader—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That was a Freudian slip.

Our leader suggested that you could take tomorrow, when it comes to using your time during question period, to meet with the Ontario Provincial Police.

I’ll be seeking unanimous consent shortly, in order to ask the House to make sure that we free you up tomorrow morning during question period so that you in fact can go and meet with the OPP and do what has to be done, so that they can continue their investigation.

Will your members of the assembly vote with our unanimous consent motion in order to allow you to do what has to be done?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I’ve been clear: I will meet with the OPP when that meeting is arranged.

CARBON MONOXIDE

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: My question is for the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, a question, I might add, that is actually on the priorities that matter to Ontarians.

Minister, the people of my community, and people in communities across the province, are concerned about the threat of carbon monoxide. In fact, not too long ago in my area, a mother and daughter had to be rushed to hospital because of a carbon monoxide leak at an Oakville hotel.

Carbon monoxide is a danger to our families, our loved ones and our neighbours. It’s an odourless and colourless gas that’s a silent killer. More than 50 people in Canada die from carbon monoxide poisoning each year. But the real tragedy is that each and every one of these deaths is preventable. As the minister charged with the safety and security of Ontarians, it’s important that you work to prevent these deaths.

Mr. Speaker, through you, can the minister please tell us what steps he has taken to help protect our friends and families from the threat of carbon monoxide?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I thank the member from Halton for raising a very important issue.

As many members know in this House, carbon monoxide gas is a silent killer that continues to claim too many lives in our province. That is why our government is committed to working with all MPPs and stakeholders to ensure that no more Ontarians lose their lives to carbon monoxide.

Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the member from Oxford and yourself on this very important issue.

Last year, we in this Legislature, passed Bill 77, the Hawkins Gignac Act, making it mandatory for all homes in Ontario to have a carbon monoxide detector.

As of April 15, there is a deadline for landlords to install carbon monoxide detectors in dwellings of up to six units, and that deadline is fast approaching. Installing a carbon monoxide alarm is perhaps one of the simplest

and most effective ways to alert you and your family to the presence of this lethal gas.

We encourage all residential homes and landlords to install carbon monoxide detectors.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Point of order from the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Hon. James J. Bradley: No.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: How can you say no when I haven't even asked?

Hon. James J. Bradley: No.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You don't even know what I'm going to ask.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I know what you're going to ask.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Excuse me.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent of this House that this Legislature give the Premier time tomorrow morning during question period to go and meet with the Ontario Provincial Police.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins–James Bay is seeking unanimous consent to provide the Premier—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do we agree?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I did hear a no.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nipissing on a point of order.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to correct my record. Earlier, I said, "What assurance can you give us that this Deputy Premier isn't tying up loose ends that may form part of the OPP investigation?"

I meant to say "deputy chief of staff."

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Attorney General on a point of order.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I believe that in the answer to my critic, the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, I said "the election commissioner." I meant the Chief Electoral Officer.

I was so excited; I thought this was a question on access to justice.

VISITORS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kitchener Centre on a point of order.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: This morning we were joined by a person from my riding, and I'd like to introduce him. Tony Stortz is from Kitchener Centre. He is a valued member of my team in the constituency office.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Beaches–East York on a point of order.

Mr. Arthur Potts: If I can beg the indulgence of the House on a point of order, I also have two young gentlemen from my riding, Alec Tuck and Ben Quinon, who are members of the Toronto Youth Cabinet. I'm delighted to see them here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Sarnia–Lambton on a point of order.

Mr. Robert Bailey: On a point of order: I'd like to invite all the members, the cabinet ministers and all of the opposition down to rooms 228 and 230 for Sarnia–Lambton Day. Come on down and enjoy some Sarnia–Lambton hospitality.

NOTICES OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services concerning the Sudbury investigation. The matter will be discussed today at 6 p.m.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Leeds–Grenville has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Premier concerning the Sudbury by-election. This matter will be debated at 6 p.m.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Will she show up for this investigation?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would like to be able to make an announcement without being interrupted.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Attorney General concerning the Sudbury by-election. This matter will be debated today at 6 p.m.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Timmins–James Bay—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's a very large net—has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Deputy Premier concerning the Sudbury by-election. This matter will be debated next Tuesday at 6 p.m.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Windsor–Tecumseh has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change concerning the Sudbury by-election. This matter will be—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sorry. Let me correct my own record: Tuesday after next week.

The member from Windsor–Tecumseh has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to his question given by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change concerning the Sudbury by-election. This matter will be debated the following Tuesday—two weeks—at 6 p.m.

Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member from Windsor West has given notice of her dissatisfaction with the answer to her question given by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services concerning the Sudbury by-election. This matter will be debated two weeks Tuesday at 6 p.m.

DEFERRED VOTES

SUPPLY ACT, 2015

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2015

Deferred vote on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 72, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015 / Projet de loi 72, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2015.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1147 to 1152.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On March 10, Mr. Bradley moved second reading of Bill 72. All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMeekin, Ted
Anderson, Granville	Fraser, John	Meilleur, Madeleine
Baker, Yvan	Gravelle, Michael	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Balkissoon, Bas	Hoggarth, Ann	Moridi, Reza
Ballard, Chris	Hoskins, Eric	Murray, Glen R.
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hunter, Mitzie	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Bradley, James J.	Jaczek, Helena	Naqvi, Yasir
Chan, Michael	Kiwala, Sophie	Oraziotti, David
Chiarelli, Bob	Kwinter, Monte	Potts, Arthur
Colle, Mike	Lalonde, Marie-France	Qaadi, Shafiq
Coteau, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Rinaldi, Lou
Crack, Grant	MacCharles, Tracy	Sandals, Liz
Damerla, Dipika	Malhi, Harinder	Sergio, Mario
Del Duca, Steven	Mangat, Amrit	Takhar, Harinder S.
Delaney, Bob	Martins, Cristina	Thibeault, Glenn
Dhillon, Vic	Matthews, Deborah	Vernile, Daiane
Dickson, Joe	Mauro, Bill	Wong, Soo
Dong, Han	McGarry, Kathryn	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	McMahon, Eleanor	Zimmer, David

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Harris, Michael	Pettapiece, Randy
Arnott, Ted	Hatfield, Percy	Sattler, Peggy
Bailey, Robert	Hillier, Randy	Scott, Laurie
Bisson, Gilles	Horwath, Andrea	Singh, Jagmeet
Clark, Steve	Jones, Sylvia	Smith, Todd
DiNovo, Cheri	MacLaren, Jack	Tabuns, Peter
Fedeli, Victor	Mantha, Michael	Taylor, Monique
Fife, Catherine	Martow, Gila	Vanthof, John
Forster, Cindy	McDonell, Jim	Walker, Bill
French, Jennifer K.	McNaughton, Monte	Wilson, Jim
Gates, Wayne	Miller, Norm	Yakabuski, John
Gélinas, France	Miller, Paul	Yurek, Jeff
Gretzky, Lisa	Natyshak, Taras	
Hardeman, Ernie	Nicholls, Rick	

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 57; the nays are 40.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

SUPPLY ACT, 2015

LOI DE CRÉDITS DE 2015

Ms. Matthews moved third reading of the following bill:

Bill 72, An Act to authorize the expenditure of certain amounts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2015 / Projet de loi 72, Loi autorisant l'utilisation de certaines sommes pour l'exercice se terminant le 31 mars 2015.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

Interjection: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Same vote? Same vote.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 57; the nays are 40.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Be it resolved that the bill do now pass and be entitled as in the motion.

Third reading agreed to.

AGRICULTURE INSURANCE ACT (AMENDING THE CROP INSURANCE ACT, 1996), 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ASSURANCE AGRICOLE (MODIFIANT LA LOI DE 1996 SUR L'ASSURANCE-RÉCOLTE)

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 40, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur l'assurance-récolte (Ontario) et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1157 to 1158.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On December 3, 2014, Mr. Leal moved second reading of Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

Mr. Delaney has moved that the question be now put.

All those in favour of Mr. Delaney's motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	French, Jennifer K.	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Anderson, Granville	Gates, Wayne	Miller, Paul

Armstrong, Teresa J.
Baker, Yvan
Balkissoon, Bas
Ballard, Chris
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bisson, Gilles
Bradley, James J.
Chan, Michael
Chiarelli, Bob
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Dong, Han
Duguid, Brad
Fife, Catherine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Forster, Cindy
Fraser, John

Gélinas, France
Gravelle, Michael
Gretzky, Lisa
Hatfield, Percy
Hoggarth, Ann
Horwath, Andrea
Hoskins, Eric
Hunter, Mitzie
Jaczek, Helena
Kiwala, Sophie
Kwinter, Monte
Lalonde, Marie-France
Leal, Jeff
MacCharles, Tracy
Malhi, Harinder
Mangat, Amrit
Mantha, Michael
Martins, Cristina
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor
McMeekin, Ted
Meilleur, Madeleine

Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Naqvi, Yasir
Natyshak, Taras
Oraziotti, David
Potts, Arthur
Qaadi, Shafiq
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sattler, Peggy
Sergio, Mario
Singh, Jagmeet
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Takhhar, Harinder S.
Taylor, Monique
Thibeault, Glenn
Vanthof, John
Vernile, Daiane
Wong, Soo
Wynne, Kathleen O.
Zimmer, David

Currently, the orthopaedic department in my riding is giving up OR times due to the lack of funding from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. It's very frustrating when OR times are available, with an outstanding team of doctors, nurses and support staff available to perform the work; unfortunately, they were unable to schedule any joint replacement surgeries for half of February and all of March due to a lack of funding from this government.

The government is hiding the fact that they're unable to provide adequate health care services due to a lack of funding, and it can be directly linked to their mismanagement of our financial dollars in our province.

The current funding allows for 174 joint replacement surgeries a year. However, that is not enough. They would need funding to cover at least 220 replacements during the fiscal year.

We have an award-winning hospital in St. Thomas, Ontario, winning awards for their wait times. However, they are being restricted on the number of joint replacements they can do. Why would you penalize a hospital when in fact they are exceeding expectations?

Currently, patients are waiting four or five months just for the surgery, and due to this lack of funding, it's being pushed further down the road. OR times will continue to be cancelled until the start of the new fiscal year.

I call upon the government to quit eroding our health care services, get your financial house in order and fund adequate health care services for my riding.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Clark, Steve
Fedeli, Victor
Hardeman, Ernie
Harris, Michael
Hillier, Randy

Jones, Sylvia
MacLaren, Jack
Martow, Gila
McDonnell, Jim
McNaughton, Monte
Miller, Norm
Nicholls, Rick

Pettapiece, Randy
Scott, Laurie
Smith, Todd
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yakabuski, John
Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 77; the nays are 21.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Leal has moved second reading of Bill 40. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, say "aye."

All those opposed, say "nay."

I believe the ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall the bill be ordered for third reading?

Minister of Agriculture?

Hon. Jeff Leal: On behalf of the agriculture community across the province of Ontario, I would ask that this bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): So ordered.

There are no further deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1202 to 1500.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

HOSPITAL SERVICES

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Today, I rise in the Legislature to question the government on the lack of funding for joint surgeries for my local orthopaedic department at the St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital.

This year, the judges chose Giles Benaway for his Ceremonies for the Dead, which examines the haunting themes of intergenerational trauma, cyclical abuse and inherited grief. It was published by Kegedonce Press.

The books will be available for sale at the gift shop on the main floor in the Legislature.

It was a delightful evening, Speaker, as always, and a very distinguished ceremony. Congratulations to all who were shortlisted. And thank you, Speaker, for promoting literacy, the arts and our publishing industry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): He can take all the time he wants.

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: And so he should.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Cambridge.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Today I rise to discuss the International Women's Day celebrations in Cambridge. On Saturday morning, more than 200 residents of Waterloo region gathered at the Galt Country Club in Cambridge to celebrate International Women's Day at a breakfast organized by the local chapter of the Canadian Federation of University Women.

Later in the day, a flash mob organized by Soroptimist International of Cambridge, gathered around Cambridge to march to Queen's Square. Women, men and children came together, holding ribbons and carrying signs in denunciation of sexual violence and in support of women everywhere.

At the breakfast event, a speech was given by Megan Lambe, director of communications and public relations for the Cambridge YWCA. Megan spoke about the importance of focusing on under-representation of women in positions of leadership.

In Ontario, we should be proud that we elected a record number of women to Queen's Park last year.

Megan also spoke in support of the direction that our Premier has taken with the introduction of It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment. Megan said, in reference to Premier Wynne's leadership on sexual violence and harassment, "I have never been so proud to be an Ontarian."

We should all be proud of this groundbreaking initiative, and we should take International Women's Day and every day to reflect upon how far we have come in forwarding women's rights and how far we will go.

ONTARIO HERITAGE AWARD FOR YOUTH ACHIEVEMENT

Mr. Bill Walker: I rise in the House today to recognize young students from my riding in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound whose group project to memorialize the sacrifice of Canadian soldiers was recently recognized by Ontario's Lieutenant Governor. This past Friday, students from Owen Sound Collegiate and Vocational Institute in Owen Sound, along with students from

Smiths Falls and District Collegiate Institute and Garth Webb Secondary School in Oakville, received the Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Youth Achievement group awards for their work on the Juno Beach project from the Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell.

The students researched the 371 Canadian servicemen who fell on June 6, 1944, D-Day, by using primary source documents, including Library and Archives Canada service files, war diaries and military histories. In some cases, the students made contact with surviving family members or regimental associations from across Canada to access photographs of the fallen servicemen.

This information was uploaded onto a Lest We Forget database, and students at Smiths Falls and District Collegiate Institute created a phone app on which users could peruse details regarding D-Day and these fallen servicemen.

Additionally, the Juno Beach Centre in Courseulles-sur-Mer, France, used our students' research for a special memorial that has been placed on-site. Tribute markers for each of the fallen soldiers were equipped with a QR code on the back. When swiped with a cellphone, details of the fallen servicemen would upload onto the user's phone. Juno Beach Centre officials have reported that this special feature at the memorial has been very popular with local French citizens.

The annual Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Awards recognize individuals and groups who have made outstanding contributions to conserving Ontario's heritage.

Mr. Speaker, I invite the House to join me in expressing our congratulations on this important project to students Molly Boley and Dylan Williams, and teachers Dave Alexander and Ryan McManaman.

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Today I would like to talk about developmental services. I meet with a lot of constituents who want services for their children with developmental handicaps. Here is a typical encounter, Speaker: My constituent Mrs. Lisa Godin is the mother of two adult children who require developmental services. Mrs. Godin expected that her two young adult sons would graduate from their local school and transition into a day program. Far from it.

First she had to get her sons assessed by Developmental Services, which she did before her sons' 18th birthday. Then she made her own inquiries into a maze of agencies and services in order to seek appropriate services. Well, by the time her eldest turned 21 and graduated from high school, he still had to wait a full year at home before being accepted into a program.

Then her youngest son also had time to graduate, and he's presently sitting at home, still waiting. Mrs. Godin has made endless calls trying to determine how much longer she must wait, but receives no answer. She wants to tour a day program but she's not allowed. Her request is simple: "I want transparency.... How long do I have to wait? Have they forgotten about us?"

The basic questions from all those families are simple: Why are children not transitioned from high school into adult day programs? I talked to the Minister for MCSS about this. She was kind and she agreed to follow up, but time is of the essence, Speaker. How much longer will those families have to wait?

FAMILY SKATE

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon in the House to announce an upcoming event in my riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore, the March Break Free Family Skate.

The family skate event in my riding will be taking place on Thursday, March 19, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. I'm very excited to be hosting this event at the MasterCard Centre for Hockey Excellence. The building is the official practice facility of the Toronto Maple Leafs NHL hockey team and their AHL affiliate, the Toronto Marlies. I am proud to call this facility a pillar for sports excellence in my riding, and it's a fantastic place to spend the afternoon skating.

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Mr. Speaker, this free family skate event will give families in my riding an opportunity to stay active during the March break. After all, this is the perfect season for everybody to lace up some skates and perfect that triple axel that they've been working on all winter. I won't be doing any triple axels, though.

I look forward to enjoying the afternoon skating with my community, and I invite everyone to join me in Etobicoke–Lakeshore for the free family skate on Thursday, March 19.

PROMPT PAYMENT

Mr. Michael Harris: Speaker, it has been close to two years since the introduction of legislation to ensure prompt payment to contractors in Ontario who are forced to wait, sometimes four months or longer for work they've long since completed. Some two years later, they are still waiting.

Speaker, where I come from, when you do the work, you should get paid; I can tell you, there are many in my area who feel the same. I have a stack of letters from my local contractors asking me why it hasn't been a priority for the government to finally ensure the fairness that prompt payment legislation would provide. I've heard from so many great contractors in my area: Dordan Mechanical and the Grand Valley Construction Association, who represents many of them—all impacted by the lack of prompt payment legislation and all continuing to wait for government to finally move on legislation it brought forth two years ago.

As G&A Masonry recently wrote me, "The existing inequity imperils employment and apprenticeship growth, and inhibits the ability of small and medium-sized contractors to invest in machinery and equipment,

as well as bid on additional work ... that means fewer jobs and slower economic growth."

Jurisdictions right across the world have gotten this right. Some 49 states and the federal government have prompt payment for publicly funded infrastructure projects—Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the European Union as well. It's time for our province to follow suit.

It's time to make this a priority. It's time for prompt payment in Ontario.

CRESCENT TOWN URBAN AGRICULTURE PROJECT

Mr. Arthur Potts: Today I'd like to speak about the Crescent Town urban agriculture project.

Many times, you'll hear me speak, as the PA to agriculture, food and rural affairs, of the great agricultural riding of Beaches–East York, and many of you may have read last week in the Metro News about an exciting project: a fish farm we're creating in a little area called Crescent Town.

Crescent Town is a part of my riding. It was founded in 1887 when Walter Massey purchased a one-square-kilometre country property around Dawes Road and Victoria Park Avenue. The Massey farm sold fresh eggs and poultry as well as fresh trout that they got from the many streams and rivulets that meandered through the property. The Massey farm, Mr. Speaker, was also the home of the City Dairy Company, which produced the first pasteurized milk in Canada.

Crescent Town has now become a property of 10,000 people in five high-rise buildings, and at the centre of the property is a retail market of about 10,000 square feet, which the management of the group have not yet been able to rent out. I went there with a bunch of community leaders to see if we could energize that space to bring it back—a local retail operation. As it turned out, there are two floors underneath which lend themselves to urban agriculture. So I'm working with a whole bunch of community leaders to see if we can grow fish and food in the basement of Crescent Town.

I'd like to thank Hasina Quader and Dr. Reza of the Bangladesh Centre and Community Services, and Lorie Fairburn of Neighbourhood Link, for their excellent leadership in this regard, and Mr. Tom McGee, who has been shepherding this project forward.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

Mr. Yvan Baker: In November, I was in Ukraine with constituents of Etobicoke Centre when we met with soldiers who were wounded during the Russian-backed invasion of Ukraine. These fathers, brothers and sons all said they were fighting for freedom and democracy—values that, as Canadians, we hold dear.

I am proud of what our Premier has done to support the Ukrainian people. She called on our federal govern-

ment to impose sanctions, called on international observers, and provided humanitarian aid.

Today, Ukraine is at war and the situation is dire. Russian-backed forces have occupied part of eastern Ukraine and continue to advance.

The soldiers I met with are fighting state-of-the-art equipment with outdated equipment, outdated weapons, some from World War II.

This conflict touches all of us. Some 14,000 civilians are dead, and one million have been displaced. The invasion is a global threat. It is a violation of international law and the international order that was achieved at such great cost after World War II.

The West's words and sanctions have not worked. Efforts at peace have failed.

For months, Ukraine's president has been asking for defensive weapons so that his nation stands a chance against the larger and more advanced Russian military. Others such as John McCain and John Boehner have echoed this call, and the US Congress has passed authorization for the US to arm Ukraine.

I urge our federal government to act on the Ukrainian Canadian Congress's February 21 statement, which calls on Canada to "dramatically increase sectoral sanctions ... increase the provision of communications and intelligence capabilities ..." and "provide Ukraine with the defensive weapons, equipment and training it needs to defend its territorial integrity...."

This is important, not only because the Ukrainian people stand little chance without our help, and not only because there is a humanitarian crisis and civilians need our help, but because the war in Ukraine is a threat to Europe, to global security, to our security and to the values that Canadians hold dear.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Ottawa South on a point of order.

Mr. John Fraser: I'd like to correct my record. Two days ago in question period, when asking a question about the CN train derailment, I referred to the Minakwa River. It is indeed the Makami River where that incident occurred.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I know my afternoon is not going well when I have to stop somebody from heckling somebody who is correcting their record.

I do say that is a point of order. All members have the opportunity to correct their record, and I thank the member for doing so.

REPORT, OMBUDSMAN OF ONTARIO

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that I have laid upon the table a report from the Ombudsman of Ontario on Hydro One.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

NATURAL GAS SUPERHIGHWAY ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'AUTOROUTE DU GAZ NATUREL

Mr. Bailey moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 76, An Act to encourage the purchase of vehicles that use natural gas as a fuel / *Projet de loi 76, Loi visant à encourager l'achat de véhicules utilisant du gaz naturel comme carburant.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Robert Bailey: The bill amends the Highway Traffic Act and the Taxation Act, 2007.

Part 8 of the Highway Traffic Act currently sets out weight limits for vehicles. The new section of the act enables the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations prescribing different weight limits for vehicles that use liquefied natural gas as fuel. The Minister of Transportation is required to table a progress report in the Legislative Assembly every year until a regulation is made.

The Taxation Act, 2007, is amended to provide for a non-refundable tax credit to taxpayers who purchase certain vehicles that use natural gas as a fuel. The tax credit would be equal to half of the Ontario portion of the HST that the taxpayer paid for the vehicle.

To qualify, the HST on the vehicle must be paid within a period of seven taxation years, beginning with the first taxation year that ends after the bill receives royal assent. Any unused tax credits in a taxation year may be carried forward and deducted in the following five years.

AFFIRMING SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'AFFIRMATION DE L'ORIENTATION SEXUELLE ET DE L'IDENTITÉ SEXUELLE

Ms. DiNovo moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 77, An Act to amend the Health Insurance Act and the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 regarding efforts to change or direct sexual orientation or gender identity / *Projet de loi 77, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'assurance-santé et la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées à l'égard des interventions visant à changer ou à influencer l'orientation sexuelle ou l'identité sexuelle.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: The bill amends the Health Insurance Act and the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, with respect to efforts to change or direct the sexual orientation or the gender identity of patients.

The amendments to the Health Insurance Act prohibit such efforts from being insured services.

The amendments to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, prohibit such efforts from being carried out as part of providing health care services to patients under 18 years of age and make it an offence to do so. The amendments also make the carrying out of such efforts with respect to patients under 18 years of age an act of professional misconduct.

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TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE HEALTH CARE ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LE FINANCEMENT TRANSPARENT ET RESPONSABLE DES SOINS DE SANTÉ

Mme Gélinas moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 78, An Act to promote transparency and accountability in the funding of health care services in Ontario / Projet de loi 78, Loi visant à promouvoir le financement transparent et responsable des services de soins de santé en Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

M^{me} France Gélinas: The bill enacts the Transparent and Accountable Health Care Act. Under this act, major health care organizations are required to comply with the Broader Public Sector Accountability Act and the Public Sector Salary Disclosure Act. These organizations are also deemed to be governmental organizations for the purposes of the Ombudsman Act. Further, the Auditor General of Ontario is authorized to audit any aspect of their operations.

The same requirement applies with respect to publicly funded suppliers. A publicly funded supplier is a person or entity that receives directly or indirectly at least \$1 million in public funds in a year from a major health sector organization or from other publicly funded suppliers.

The act also provides for the disclosure of payments made by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan. The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is required to publish an annual disclosure statement. It must disclose the total amount paid to a person or entity for services provided during a year, if the person or entity receives at least \$100,000. The disclosure statement must include a caution set out in a subsection of the act.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

GROWTH PLANNING

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I rise today to speak to Bill 73, the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act. This proposed legislation would, if passed, help Ontario communities grow and thrive in the 21st century.

In the fall of 2013, our government held province-wide consultations on the way our cities and towns plan and pay for growth. We heard different perspectives from the public, community groups, aboriginal communities, municipalities and the building and development sector on what changes need to be made. To sum up, Ontarians told us we needed to make some improvements.

Ontario is a dynamic place to live, work and raise a family, and we need to make sure that growth in Ontario is managed smartly. If we plan well today, we can assure a high quality of life for tomorrow, for us and for our children, and we can attract industry, create jobs and further protect green spaces.

The reforms that we are proposing would, if passed, improve the processes communities and residents use to determine how their neighbourhoods will grow and improve how to pay for this growth. These reforms will benefit all Ontarians, whether they live in large urban centres or smaller and/or rural communities.

The amendments we're proposing would give residents and local councils greater say in what happens in their neighbourhoods. We would do this by encouraging something that we call the community planning permit system. This system would allow a community to plan their neighbourhood in a way that addresses their real, local needs. The best part, Mr. Speaker, is that our changes, if passed, would mean that once a community planning permit system is in place, it would not be subject to any appeals of private applications for five years.

Municipalities would also have a more predictable planning system and have more control over official plans and plan reviews. The proposed amendments, if passed, would help our municipalities recover capital costs for important infrastructure like transit projects.

Our proposed reforms would build more transparency and accountability into the development charges system.

To encourage parkland and green space, proposed amendments would also ensure more municipalities put in place a parks plan to inform where resources are directed, and municipalities would need to detail how development charges and other growth-related fees are actually spent.

Mr. Speaker, all Ontarians should be able to count on a planning system that's predictable in terms of what is or is not likely to be approved, and all Ontario residents should have a say in what is built in their neighbourhoods.

I urge all members to support this bill. Thank you very much.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to rise today to respond to the minister and speak to the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act. I want to start by acknowledging that the minister's staff and his ministry gave us a briefing earlier this week. It was very helpful, and I want to thank him and the ministry for that.

Mr. Speaker, over the next few years the minister and his staff are going to be very busy. According to the minister's mandate letter, he has to review the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, the building code, the Ontario Disaster Relief Assistance Program, the Municipal Act, and the ones that are relevant to this debate: the Ontario Municipal Board, or the OMB; the growth plan; the greenbelt plans; and a coordinated review of provincial land use plans. While I'm pleased that the government has indicated they're going to consult on these issues, it's a little concerning that the minister has introduced a bill that impacts the Planning Act and the OMB before these consultations have actually taken place.

According to his mandate letter, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Attorney General are to work together with key stakeholders and "recommend possible reforms that would improve the OMB's role within the broader land use planning system." Mr. Speaker, from what I've heard, that review is still coming. But if it hasn't even started yet, how can the minister introduce changes to the OMB? How can we be sure that any changes made today are going to be reflective of the results of the review? Wouldn't it make more sense to conduct a full review and come up with a comprehensive plan and then introduce legislation to implement it?

This is not the only review that we've seen conducted before this legislation was introduced. Less than two weeks ago, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing launched a review of the greenbelt, the Niagara Escarpment, the Oak Ridges moraine and the growth plan. This is going to be a comprehensive review of the land use in these regions. In the government's discussion document for the review, it says, "The four plans work with many other acts, plans, policies and strategies to achieve provincial priorities and goals. This coordinated review is an opportunity to consider how well the plans support and align with broader provincial initiatives, legislation and long-term goals for the region. It is also an opportunity to consider whether other initiatives can be more effectively leveraged to achieve the goals of the plans."

Given how much these plans are required to work together and that the government is about to start on months of consultation, it seems ironic that in less than a week after the land use consultation was announced, the government introduced legislation which would change both the land use planning process and the development charges, which we all know impact community growth.

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This bill is entitled the Smart Growth for Our Communities Act. To me, the concept of smart growth should

not only include policies that protect our land, but a comprehensive plan for how our communities will function: a plan for transit, a plan for how to accommodate growth, a plan for economic development. If the government is in the process of developing these plans for the Niagara Escarpment, Oak Ridges moraine, green belt and Golden Horseshoe, shouldn't that plan come before legislation making changes to the Planning Act? How can you determine the legislative changes needed to get you to your destination if you don't know where you're going?

Development charges require a balance between encouraging economic activity and ensuring that municipalities have the funds needed to provide services for the added growth. I know that some organizations have already expressed concerns about the potential increases in development charges under this bill, and I look forward to working with them and municipal organizations to determine what the impact will be.

There are some specific sections in this bill that cause me concern, Minister, such as the addition of municipal planning committees that include at least one member of the public. While they sound great in principle, for municipalities like mine that currently make planning decisions in open council, it will result in duplication and, in some cases, less transparency. Those decisions are currently being made in an open meeting in front of members of the public and the media. This proposed change could result in those discussions and planning decisions taking place in the back room, where very few people will get to witness what happens.

I look forward to the opportunity to raise more of these specific concerns in second reading debate. I hope that will occur much later, after much more consultation and the reviews have been completed.

I want to thank the minister for giving me this opportunity. I hope he pays some attention and actually has the consultation that I'm suggesting.

Ms. Cindy Forster: It's an honour, as always, to rise on behalf of New Democrats and our leader, Andrea Horwath, and as the NDP critic currently for municipal affairs and housing, to respond to the minister's comments on Bill 73. It's good to see some positive changes included in this bill. New Democrats have advocated for a long time for changes to this particular ministry.

It seeks to give local municipalities more input on how their communities develop, and to provide opportunities to fund growth-related infrastructure, like transit, through the development charge system. Unfortunately, the bill falls short of long-standing promises by the Liberals to consider much-needed reforms to the OMB, the Ontario Municipal Board, and changes that require developers to factor in affordable housing within the local zoning plans.

I don't have to remind anybody that we are in dire need of these changes. In fact, this government made repeated promises going back over a decade, and yet there has been no action on any of these issues. In 2003, OMB reform was a significant part of the Liberal

government's platform during the election. Since then, promises have been made by various ministers on this file to look thoroughly at the OMB and to bring greater balance into decision-making, but it hasn't happened.

In August 2013, the Liberal Premier and then-Municipal Affairs Minister Linda Jeffrey, in a presentation to AMO, promised to reform the controversial OMB. Specifically, they promised to make it more accountable to the public. But despite this, OMB reform was specifically excluded from the land use planning review announced that same fall.

Why would this element be excluded from the bill? Two years, no action. Conflicts between municipalities, developers and community groups around land use planning have been ongoing for decades and we can't fix them without addressing those problems. The government needs to deliver on their promises.

Currently, the odds are stacked against municipalities and local communities. Some stats show that when you end up at the OMB, the municipalities lose 65% to 70% of the time—in their own communities. If there's a developer involved, they lose even more than that. Victories are significantly higher when it's a developer.

No other province has a tribunal that has the power that the OMB has in Ontario. Part of the problem is that local residents and community groups don't have the money to fight developers, or to fight municipalities, for that matter, around land use issues.

A prime example is Waterloo. In 2013, they had a 10-year plan that was overturned by the OMB, which allowed residential development sprawl that was 10 times larger than what the municipality was asking for. The OMB tore it up, allowed it to happen, defied the official plan of the municipality and defied the province's own Places to Grow Act. Something needs to change here.

I want to talk a bit about the issue of inclusionary zoning and the fact that we still have a lot of homelessness in this province. In fact, my colleague from Parkdale—High Park, Cheri DiNovo, reintroduced her bill for the fifth time last year. It would have allowed municipalities to pass inclusionary zoning bylaws that would have set minimum requirements for affordable units within new developments as a low-cost way to ensure that Ontarians have much-needed access to low-cost housing—five times over the last, I think, eight years.

The Liberal member for Ottawa Centre is quoted as saying that both municipal board reforms and inclusionary zoning remain on the government's to-do list. When? Unfortunately, there are no time frames; there are no specifics. Like the OMB issue, I fear that this will just turn into another empty Liberal promise.

It's about time, Speaker, that the Liberals take some action on these issues. They're important elements that begin to address some of the issues in this particular bill. However, there are critical issues that are actually left out. When I met during the briefing earlier this week, we had no time frame from the government on when they're going to move forward with the actual review of the OMB.

What we're asking here is that the government keep their promises, that they deliver on their promises and that they move on the OMB issue and the inclusionary zoning issue today.

PETITIONS

MISSING PERSONS

Ms. Catherine Fife: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario does not have missing persons legislation; and

"Whereas police are not able to conduct a thorough investigation upon receipt of a missing person report where criminal activity is not considered the cause; and

"Whereas this impedes investigators in determining the status and possibly the location of missing persons; and

"Whereas this legislation exists and is effective in other provinces; and

"Whereas negotiating rights to safety that do not violate rights to privacy has been a challenge in establishing missing persons law;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"We ask that the Attorney General's office work with the office of the privacy commissioner to implement missing persons legislation that grants investigators the opportunity to apply for permissions to access information that will assist in determining the safety or whereabouts of missing persons for whom criminal activity is not considered the cause."

It's my pleasure to affix my signature and give this petition to page Vaughn.

TRESPASSING

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My petition is to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas when private property is damaged it is left to property owners to repair these damages, and the costs can quickly add up to thousands of dollars. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has asked for a minimum fine for trespassing and an increase on the maximum limit on compensation for damages;

"Whereas Sylvia Jones's private member's Bill 36, the Respecting Private Property Act, will amend the current Trespass to Property Act by creating a minimum fine of \$500 for trespassing and increasing the maximum compensation for damages to \$25,000; and

"Whereas the Respecting Private Property Act will allow property owners to be fairly compensated for destruction to their property, and will also send a message that trespassing is a serious issue by creating a minimum fine;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To support Sylvia Jones's private member's Bill 36, the Respecting Private Property Act, and schedule public hearings so that Bill 36 can be passed without further delay."

For obvious reasons, I support this petition, affix my name to it and give it to page Mundter to take to the table.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, did I tell you you're my favourite Speaker? I just thought I would throw that in.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Oh, my God. Look at that. The other Speaker is right there. That wasn't very smart.

Miss Monique Taylor: We thought you'd left the room.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Yes, exactly.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Liberal government of Ontario is currently reviewing proposals to sell off a significant amount of our shared public assets such as Ontario Power Generation (OPG), Hydro One, and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO); and

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"Whereas our shared public assets provide more affordable hydro, develop environmentally friendly energy, create thousands of good Ontario jobs, and are accountable to all Ontarians; and

"Whereas our shared public assets put money in the public bank account so we can invest in hospitals, roads and schools; and

"Whereas this Liberal government is more interested in helping out wealthy shareholders and investors than they are in the hardworking Ontarians who are building this province;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to:

"Stop the selling-off of our shared public assets. Keep our public assets in public hands."

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask page Natalie to bring it to the Clerk.

TRESPASSING

Ms. Laurie Scott: "Petition to pass Bill 36, the Respecting Private Property Act.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas when private property is damaged it is left to property owners to repair these damages, and the costs can quickly add up to thousands of dollars. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has asked for a minimum fine for trespassing and an increase on the maximum limit on compensation for damages;

"Whereas Sylvia Jones's private member's Bill 36, the Respecting Private Property Act, will amend the current Trespass to Property Act by creating a minimum fine of

\$500 for trespassing and increasing the maximum compensation for damages to \$25,000; and

"Whereas the Respecting Private Property Act will allow property owners to be fairly compensated for destruction to their property, and will also send a message that trespassing is a serious issue by creating a minimum fine;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To support Sylvia Jones's private member's Bill 36, the Respecting Private Property Act, and schedule public hearings so that Bill 36 can be passed without further delay."

I agree with this and pass it on to the page.

SEVERANCE PAYMENTS

Ms. Cindy Forster: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas over 100 workers in Fort Erie lost their jobs when Vertis Communications declared bankruptcy under the ESA (Employment Standards Act) and closed;

"Whereas Vertis Communications declared bankruptcy in the United States, circumventing Canadian and Ontario labour law and refusing to pay workers their due severance to the amount of \$2.7 million;

"Whereas the Canadian federal government's Wage Earners Protection Plan does not apply to workers from Vertis because they did not apply for bankruptcy in Canada;

"Whereas the federal government has refused to apply an exemption under the WEPP for these workers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That this government stand up for workers' rights and end their 'no-strings-attached' relationship with foreign corporations;

"That this government ensure that these workers and any workers in this situation get their due severance."

I support this petition, affix my signature and will send it with page Hannah.

LEGAL AID

Mr. Bob Delaney: I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly that has been provided to me by a number of people here, mostly in south Mississauga but including a number in Meadowvale and Lisgar. It reads as follows:

"Whereas Mississauga Community Legal Services provides free legal services to legal aid clients within a community of nearly 800,000 population; and

"Whereas legal services in communities like Toronto and Hamilton serve, per capita, fewer people living in poverty, are better staffed and better funded; and

"Whereas Mississauga and Brampton have made progress in having Ontario provide funding for human services on a fair and equitable, population-based model;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of the Attorney General revise the current distribution of allocated funds ... and adopt a population-based model, factoring in population growth rates to ensure Ontario funds are allocated in an efficient, fair and effective manner."

I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and to send it down with page Muntder.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ontario Ombudsman, who is an officer of the Legislature, is not allowed to provide trusted, independent investigations of complaints against children's aid societies; and

"Whereas Ontario is the only province in Canada not allowing their Ombudsman to investigate complaints against children's aid societies; and

"Whereas people who feel they have been wronged by the actions of children's aid societies are left feeling helpless with nowhere else to turn for help to correct systemic issues;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to grant the Ombudsman the power to investigate children's aid societies."

I couldn't agree with this more. I'm going to affix my name to it and give it to page Dhairya to bring to the Clerk.

TAXATION

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Liberal government has indicated they plan on introducing a new carbon tax in 2015; and

"Whereas Ontario taxpayers have already been burdened with a health tax of \$300 to \$900 per person that doesn't necessarily go into health care, a \$2-billion smart meter program that failed to conserve energy, and households are paying almost \$700 more annually for unaffordable subsidies under the Green Energy Act; and

"Whereas a carbon tax scheme would increase the cost of everyday goods including gasoline and home heating; and

"Whereas the government continues to run unaffordable deficits without a plan to reduce spending while collecting \$30 billion more annually in tax revenues than 11 years ago; and

"Whereas the aforementioned points lead to the conclusion that the government is seeking justification to raise taxes to pay for their excessive spending, without accomplishing any concrete targets;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To abandon the idea of introducing yet another unaffordable and ineffective tax on Ontario families and businesses."

I agree with this and will be passing it off to page Natalie.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Liberal government of Ontario is currently reviewing proposals to sell off a significant amount of our shared public assets such as Ontario Power Generation (OPG), Hydro One, and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO); and

"Whereas our shared public assets provide more affordable hydro, develop environmentally friendly energy, create thousands of good Ontario jobs, and are accountable to all Ontarians; and

"Whereas our shared public assets put money in the public bank account so we can invest in hospitals, roads and schools; and

"Whereas this Liberal government is more interested in helping out wealthy shareholders and investors than they are in the hardworking Ontarians who are building this province; and

"Whereas Ontario is stronger when there is shared prosperity;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Stop the selling-off of our shared public assets. Keep our public assets in public hands."

I sign this petition and give it to the page.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mr. Bob Delaney: Again, I have a petition addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly that has been sent to me many, many times by countless people at this point. It's called "Fluoridate All Ontario Drinking Water." It reads as follows:

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices

across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I'm pleased to sign and support this petition and to send it down with page Natalie.

WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I have more petitions to do with improved winter road maintenance, from the Huntsville area. It reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the area maintenance contract system has failed Ontario drivers the past two winters;

"Whereas unsafe conditions led to the maintenance contractor being fined in the winter of 2013-14, as well as leading to a special investigation by the provincial Auditor General;

"Whereas the managed outsourcing system for winter roads maintenance, where the private contractor is responsible for maintenance, but MTO patrols the region and directs the contractor on the deployment of vehicles, sand and salt, has a proven track record for removing snow and ensuring that Ontario's highways are safe for travellers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Ministry of Transportation take immediate action to improve the maintenance of winter roads based on the positive benefits of the previous delivery model, where MTO plays more of a role in directing the private contractor."

I support this petition.

1550

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from Madame Dorothy Groulx, from my riding, on Radar Road in Hamner, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas the Ontario government" has made PET scanning "a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients...; and

"Whereas, since October 2009, insured PET scans are performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

"Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with Health Sciences North"—our hospital—"its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

"We ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through Health Sciences North, thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens" of the northeast.

It has been a long time, Speaker, but I don't give up easily. We will get a PET scanner. Hannah will bring my petition to the Clerk.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Norm Miller: I have a petition from the CAA with regard to the "Slow Down, Move Over" legislation.

"CAA petition in support

"Slow Down, Move Over legislation

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Highway Traffic Act requires drivers of a motor vehicle to slow down upon approaching an emergency vehicle that is stopped on the same side of a highway as that on which the driver is travelling; and

"Whereas over 40 states in the United States and five provinces in Canada have included roadside assistance workers in 'Slow Down, Move Over' legislation, providing protection for tow trucks assisting motorists; and

"Whereas everyone deserves a safe place to work;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario amend the Highway Traffic Act with respect to safety precautions to take when approaching roadside assistance vehicles."

I support this petition and will sign it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Thank you, Speaker—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't see you back there. The member from Oshawa. I'm sorry.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to the Legislature of Ontario:

"Whereas the community of Windsor-Essex county has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada resulting in stressful lives and financial inadequacies for many of its residents and businesses; and

"Whereas recently the Ford Motor Company was considering Windsor, Ontario, as a potential site for a new global engine that would create 1,000 new jobs (and as many as 7,000 spinoff jobs) for our community; and

"Whereas partnership with government was critical to secure this investment from Ford; and

"Whereas the inability of Ford and the Ontario" government "to come to an agreement for partnership contributed to the loss of this project;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To insist that the Ontario government exhaust all available opportunities to reopen the discussions around

the Ford investment in Windsor and to develop a national auto strategy and review current policy meant to attract investment in the auto sector.”

I support this wholeheartedly, affix my name to it and will send it to the Clerk with Andrew.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO IMMIGRATION ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'IMMIGRATION EN ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 9, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 49, An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 49, Loi portant sur l'immigration en Ontario et apportant une modification connexe à la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Bill 49 was last debated from the government side. Seeing that the members are not here for that, we are moving on. The official opposition will now further debate.

The member from Kitchener–Conestoga.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you for that kind introduction. I'm pleased to speak to Bill 49 today, the act with respect to immigration to Ontario.

Immigrants are an important part of what makes up our population here in the province of Ontario and, as well, in the region I come from, the region of Waterloo. As an innovation hub and manufacturing hub for the province of Ontario and the rest of Canada, Waterloo region plays an integral role in attracting skilled workers from around the world to develop our technologically inclined sector.

About a year and a half ago, the National Household Survey reported that 23% of people in Kitchener-Waterloo and Cambridge were foreign-born. This is a large factor of our population that needs to find well-paying jobs, good education and affordable housing to become strong members of our community so that they can live and thrive in the province of Ontario.

Of course, I'd like to highlight some of the work that our region has done in collaboration with the federal government's immigration strategy.

In 2009, Citizenship and Immigration Canada put a call for proposals out to communities in Ontario that might be interested in developing a local immigration partnership to develop community-based partnerships that plan services around the needs of immigrants. At that time, the Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network established a local immigration partnership. During 2009 and 2010, a large number of stakeholders in Waterloo region worked to develop the strategy and establish three key pillars: (1) settle, (2) work, and (3) belong.

The Settle Steering Group is responsible for working in collaboration with community partners to carry out

strategic activities to improve the coordination of and access to services that facilitate immigrant settlement. Their activities include mapping of services, identifying barriers and access to services, coordinated planning, and training opportunities for enhanced service provision.

The Work Steering Group is responsible for working in collaboration with community partners to carry out strategic activities with respect to job creation. Members represent businesses and community sectors, including financial services, education, manufacturing, small business, health care, municipal government, employment service providers and members of the immigrant community. The Work Steering Group also supports the government-funded immigrant internship and mentorship programs for internationally trained professionals.

The goal of both programs is to support a newcomer's efforts to become professionally established in our community through paid work placements in their field, gaining valuable Canadian work experience; or through an opportunity to be mentored by local workers, where they can learn about working in the Canadian culture. The mentorship program, provided by the YMCAs of Cambridge and Kitchener-Waterloo, matches foreign-trained professionals with experienced professionals from Canada based on shared education, similar work experience and common career goals. The immigrant internship program delivered by Conestoga College, located in my riding of Kitchener–Conestoga, matches immigrants with a post-secondary degree or journey person status from another country with employers through paid internships. The length of the internship can vary. Participating in the internship program is a great way for employers to connect with international talent in our region.

Some of those employers participating would be COM DEV of Cambridge, Conestoga College, Deloitte, the Greater KW Chamber of Commerce, Scotiabank, Teledyne Dalsa technologies—the list goes on and on.

Finally, the Belong Steering Group will focus on co-ordination and collective action in order to make Waterloo region a more inclusive community. It includes public awareness and inclusion, as well as immigrant leadership and civic participation across the following areas: education, community supports and information, justice, arts and culture etc.

Recognizing all the work done by Immigration Waterloo Region, it's time that the province get up to speed with supporting our immigrants in my riding and across the entire province. Bill 49, an act with respect to immigration to Ontario, aims at working with the federal government's extensive changes to the immigration system in Canada over the last decade, including the federal skilled worker program and the provincial nominee program, to name a few.

This past January, the federal government introduced the expression-of-interest immigration reforms to make the system more responsive to labour market demands, to ensure that immigrants can find well-paying jobs and become strong citizens of Canadian communities across the country. As such, the federal government is encour-

aging provinces to develop systems that will allow for them to participate in the EOI system that is now implemented.

EOI really works in two steps. First, prospective immigrants would indicate their interest in coming to Canada by providing information electronically about their skills, work experience and other attributes. Individuals who meet certain eligibility criteria will have their expressions of interest placed in a pool and ranked against others already in that pool. Citizenship and Immigration Canada would only invite the best candidates, including those with in-demand skills or with job offers, to apply for a visa. Expressions of interest that are not chosen after a period of time may be removed from the pool. As a result, application backlogs would not accumulate and processing times would be kept to a minimum.

Of course, CIC also assesses applicants on a variety of other factors, such as education, work experience and language ability, with a greater emphasis on the ever-changing needs of the Canadian labour market. The Canadian government is working with provincial and territorial partners to make EOI a success, as we see outlined here in this bill. In partnership with Ontario's employers, the hope is to be ready to find candidates in the EOI pool that meet their skills requirements when the domestic labour force cannot.

1600

As we look at fixing our immigration policy in Ontario, I want to take a moment to look at other provinces and territories in Canada. Of course, the most obvious and cited example is Quebec's immigration policy. As a result of the 1991 Canada-Quebec Accord, Quebec fully assumed responsibility for establishing immigration levels and for the selection and integration of immigrants in areas under its responsibility. Quebec develops its own policies and programs, legislates, regulates and sets its own standards. In contrast, Ontario's immigration policy is tied to that of the federal government.

Recently the federal government released immigration stats for the last year. What they also provided was a table of statistics from 2004 through to the end of 2013 on the amount of permanent residents in each province and territory. There are three categories that make up the definition of a permanent resident. They are based on foreign nationals sponsored by close relatives or family members in Canada and include spouses or partners, dependent children, parents and grandparents. Permanent residents are also based on economic immigrants, who are people selected for their skills and ability to contribute to Canada's economy, including skilled workers, business immigrants, provincial and territorial nominees, and live-in caregivers. In addition, permanent residents are based on refugees, which include government-assisted refugees, privately sponsored refugees, refugees landed in Canada and dependents of refugees landed in Canada who were living abroad.

Here in Ontario, the number of permanent residents is quite startling. Newfoundland and Labrador saw their

permanent resident number nearly double from 2004 to 2013. PEI's permanent resident number has, in fact, tripled. Nova Scotia has increased by more than 1,000; New Brunswick, the same. Quebec's numbers increased the same as well during the same time frame. Manitoba's number almost doubled, and Saskatchewan's number increased from roughly 1,000 to 10,000 during the same time frame.

What is interesting is that you can clearly see that the numbers are increasing around Canada, but here in Ontario that is not the case. In the time from 2004 to 2013, Ontario has lost 25,000 permanent residents. If we look at how many of those permanent residents are economic immigrants, which this bill focuses on, the numbers get worse. In Ontario, in 2004, the number was 67,000. In 2013, that number dropped by 20,000 to just 47,000.

Let's compare those numbers to the western provinces. We continue hearing stories about Ontario-trained skilled workers packing up and heading west. Manitoba, in 2003, had 5,000 economic immigrants. That number almost doubled in 2013 to 9,600. Saskatchewan had 883 economic immigrants in 2004, and due to their job creation strategy and investment in their mining sectors, they increased their permanent residents 11 times to over, 9,000. Alberta, for instance, had 8,700 in 2004, and in 2013 they had 22,000.

It is clear that the number of jobs available is reflective of the number of permanent residents in the provinces and territories across Canada. This is why Ontario isn't meeting the mark.

We'll have more opportunity to get into that. I did prepare 20 minutes; I know I'm now on 10 minutes, so I'll conclude in the few seconds that I have left. I look forward to questions and comments, and I'll finish up in the last two minutes that I have. Thank you, Speaker, for the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I want to speak to this bill because, first of all, it is my critic role. I'm the critic for citizenship and immigration and international trade, so it's obviously something of interest to me.

I had a meeting this afternoon with the CFS. One of things that we talk about as well is international students. We are encouraging international students to come to Ontario to attend our post-secondary education institutions. We want them to come here. But when an international student comes to Ontario, the tuition costs are astronomically high. You're talking maybe \$10,000 to \$12,000 a year. One of the concerns the CFS brought to the table was that international students are covered under UHIP, so they have to pay for that as well. That's another \$2,000 to \$3,000 a year.

One of their asks was, if we're encouraging international students to come to Ontario to attend our PSE, why not give them the same opportunity to be covered under OHIP?

Have that window where they arrive in Canada and have that three-month waiting period—they would have

their own insurance that they have to pay—but then, after the three months, they could access our health care system. We're encouraging them to study in Canada, specifically in Ontario, but we're not providing the support services they might need for health care.

The international students have spoken about the expense, and access to UHIP is also limited to a certain number of doctors, which makes it difficult, of course, when they need medical attention.

On that note, I think we could be looking at topics beyond the bill that's here today, so that we can encourage international students but also have the supports they require when they get here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Minister of Community and Social Services.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I'm pleased to rise and make a few comments in response to the member for Kitchener—Conestoga, and also talk a little bit about Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act.

This bill, of course, had its origin a number of years ago, actually. On November 5, 2012, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration launched A New Direction: Ontario's Immigration Strategy. The proposed legislation in this bill supports the implementation of this strategy.

In 2013, our government reaffirmed that Ontario's Immigration Strategy should respond to the province's demographic and economic realities. The province will be proactive in attracting the best and brightest in the world to Ontario, and helping immigrants and their families to settle and prosper.

Indeed, in my riding of Oak Ridges—Markham we have a population of some 250,000. In fact, it is the largest riding in Canada by population. Some 40% of my constituents were born outside of Canada: 20% from China and some 10% from south Asia—India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. I must say that many of these individuals are truly the best and the brightest.

This legislation will allow more immigrants to come and settle here in Ontario. The way we're doing this, of course, is to have an opportunity to set our own immigration targets for Ontario's selection programs. We want to ensure that we align the skills of our new immigrants with the labour market opportunities we have here in Ontario.

There are many other important provisions in this bill, and I certainly urge all members of the House to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonnell: It's great to listen to my colleague from Kitchener—Conestoga when he talks about some of the issues with this bill. I know we will be supporting it, but it's interesting, that when you look at Ontario, which has really been a province of immigrants, and how, for well over 100 years, we've been growing and attracting them. Now we're having a problem, because we have no jobs.

People who are coming to this country are depending on a livelihood; the economic immigrants need a place

where they can actually get a job. The action we see from this government, really, is one of blaming somebody else that we're not getting our fair share. Well, it's a category where we're not getting our fair share because there are no jobs coming here.

We don't see it just with new Canadians, but we see it with our young students and we see it with the general public. No longer is a minimum wage job looked upon as a good job. People come and they want more. They want some growth and some possibilities. Under this government, we've seen the percentage of minimum wage jobs skyrocket, but we don't think that's right. We think that our goal shouldn't really be a basic job; it should be a job where people can grow, raise a family and buy a house. That's why we're seeing new Canadians not stopping here anymore. They're going directly to the other provinces.

It's embarrassing when you look at the drop in population in that segment. I wouldn't have thought that was so, but when you look at what's happening, it's a sign of the last 12 years that this government has gone off course, I think, and they've forgotten what's required for economic growth. No longer are we looking for minimum wage jobs—they think the solution is to raise the minimum wage. But our goal is really about people getting great jobs. I look forward to speaking more on that today.

1610

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Ms. Cindy Forster: We're happy to see some legislation coming forward on this whole immigration issue, because we know that certainly Ontario has been falling behind in attracting the number of new immigrants who actually arrive in this province, but we need to really be aware that there's not a lot in this bill that addresses the many challenges that newcomers actually face when they come to Canada or come to Ontario.

The Liberal government has had more than 10 years to pass legislation. Just like I talked about a few minutes ago on inclusionary zoning and the Ontario Municipal Board, they've been around for 11 years but they haven't passed any legislation to actually assist newcomers.

I had an opportunity to reach out to the Welland Heritage Council about this legislation, and the advice from their immigration expert was that as we proceed with this legislation, it would be good to reflect on what changes Ontario can make to address the wage and opportunity gaps between immigrants and native-born Canadians, because stats show that skilled immigrants are underemployed or unemployed due to barriers that they probably didn't even know about before they landed in this country, in this province, and some of those barriers are more prevalent in the province of Ontario. So while doctors and engineers arrive in Canada and don't necessarily expect to be absorbed immediately into the system, it would help if there was a clearer picture when people are immigrating into Canada and Ontario, to be clear about what adjustments they are actually going to have to make when they arrive in this province.

Thanks for the opportunity, and thanks to the member from Kitchener–Conestoga for his comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Kitchener–Conestoga has two minutes.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you, Speaker. I appreciate those who chimed in: the member for London–Fanshawe, the Minister of Community and Social Services, my colleague from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry and, finally, the member from Welland. Thank you very much.

I wanted to get to a recent Auditor General's report on closing. She reported on the provincial nominee program, and I will share, really, her findings with those listening, which are actually quite interesting. The auditor stated that "the ministry needs to have robust, fair and transparent processes to allow it to consistently make the best nomination decisions. It also needs to track and measure how well people nominated in the past have in fact contributed to Ontario's economic development."

In her report, she explains, "Immigration selection programs are inherently at high risk of immigration fraud." A weak immigration program, one not keeping par with today's technologies, can be targeted, she says, which is true in Ontario. This means there is a significant risk that the provincial nominee program "might not always be nominating qualified individuals who can be of economic benefit to Ontario."

In conclusion on Bill 49, the government must implement a better database system, clearer rules and guidelines for ministry employees, enforcement mechanisms and security tracking. At the end of the day, those who immigrate to Canada do so for a better life for themselves and their families. They want a good job that pays them enough to support their family, and employers want skilled labour to help their business. It is the government's responsibility to be the facilitator and enforce these rules.

Speaker, I give the government the task to follow through on their commitment of Bill 49 by cleaning up our immigration and working more closely with the federal and municipal governments. But in addition to that, I ask the government to put forward a job creation plan in partnership with Bill 49 to address the serious issue facing over 600,000 men and women who don't have a job here in Ontario today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you to the member opposite for the opportunity to speak to this bill, An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991.

I would also like to thank my colleague from London–Fanshawe for her work as critic for citizenship, immigration and international trade, and for her thoughtful and poignant remarks on this bill when it was first introduced for second reading.

I would be remiss if I didn't recognize our NDP colleague and former critic Michael Prue, who brought

passion and expertise from this field into this Legislature. Thank you to him for all of his work on the previous Bill 161.

Now I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill today, a bill which has been a long time in the making.

My region of Durham is growing and becoming more and more diverse. We have the fruit and farm industry and opportunities for seasonal and migrant work. Our communities are growing and are expanding to welcome newcomers from around the world. Immigration concerns are by no means localized to any one area of province. While I am pleased to be a part of this debate here in a multicultural centre like Toronto, I am glad to be able to bring voices we don't often hear from this this Legislature.

We are pleased to see the government moving forward on some portions of this bill, but as always, the process has taken too long and the scope is too narrow. What this bill is is a step in the right direction.

In 2012, the government convened a round table of experts to review what changes and improvements were needed to Ontario's immigration system. The report they released, entitled *Expanding Our Routes To Success*, made 32 recommendations of changes the government could and should make, which would eventually inform the government's launch of *A New Direction: Ontario's Immigration Strategy*. From that strategy, we eventually come to the contents of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, it has been a long road, and today we will talk about some of the things that made it into this bill and some of the things that didn't; what we feel are steps in the right direction and what we can do to build on those first steps.

I would like to start by looking at one of the recommendations made by the government's Expert Roundtable on Immigration: "Employers and communities need to be champions in the integration of immigrants." This is a fairly broad statement, but its implications are significant. This bill acknowledges the importance of immigration to Ontario's economic future, but it does not properly address many of the fundamental challenges that newcomers face. Whether it is settlement issues such as ensuring that appropriate and affordable housing is available or professional barriers such as the issues newcomers encounter with receiving accreditation in their field, we need to consider the whole process when we are making change. We need to have supports. The lack of necessary bridge programs leads to instability. Whether someone is an expectant mother, diagnosed with a disease, or a victim of abuse, newcomers in their first three months in the province lack the safety nets that otherwise exist for other Ontarians. In Quebec, there are policies in place to protect newcomers if they unfortunately end up in challenging circumstances. In Ontario, however, the lack of policy has a devastating impact on the lives of countless newcomers.

Another concern is that this bill also doesn't do anything to close the existing loopholes when it comes to temporary and migrant workers. This means that this bill

will do nothing to address the fact that migrant workers are immensely more vulnerable to exploitation, and will do nothing to address the crisis of precarious employment that exists, in general, in our province. This is not a small portion of the population.

In 2012, Ontario had over 70,000 migrant workers compared to fewer than 50,000 economic-class immigrants who were granted permanent residency status that year.

Typically speaking, the fastest growth of migrant workers has been in low-wage industries, through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. In 2012, over 17,000 employers applied for migrant labour through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and, as all of us remember from the headlines, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program has not been a resounding success.

Case in point: Earlier this year, more than 150 migrant construction workers filed a lawsuit against Ottawa for discrimination under a program that permits them to work in Canada but allows only English-speaking candidates to stay on permanently.

I'd like to read you a quote from Juvenal Cabral, a 48-year-old Portuguese-speaking custom carpenter from Azores, who is also one of the plaintiffs: "They did not require English to have us work here on work permits. When we wanted to stay, they said we needed to pass the English test to qualify. Why are we good enough to work here but not good enough to stay?"

As we follow this case, we should remain aware of its implications and work to improve the working conditions and living conditions for migrant workers here in Ontario. Hopefully our actions in Ontario will give the government of Canada the inspiration it needs to address these problems on the federal level.

In 2006, a federal government review of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program acknowledged the failure of the program to safeguard migrant workers from exploitation. A 2009 review by the federal Auditor General also noted abuses and inadequate oversight, yet these problems continue today.

Since migrant worker exploitation isn't a focus in this bill, I would like to focus on it here. In a response to these issues, the Ontario Federation of Labour released a report in August 2013 entitled *Labour Without Borders: Towards a Migrant Workers' Bill of Rights*. We know it was also distributed to government. The report analyzes the conditions that migrant workers experience in Canada, and ultimately proposes a bill of rights for migrant workers, to protect them from abuses and exploitation.

1620

I want to take this opportunity to read into the record the proposed bill of rights for migrant workers from this OFL report.

"All migrant workers should have the following inalienable rights:

"(1) Permanent residency and citizenship rights: ... The capacity for migrant workers to contribute to communities in Ontario should be recognized and they should have access to permanent residency.

"(2) Right to information: All migrant workers should have access to information about human rights, labour rights, workplace health and safety and employment standards....

"(3) Union protection and labour rights: ... Many migrant workers face the threat of being blacklisted or not being invited back to Canada if they try to organize. As per the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the International Labour Organization convention number 98, all migrant workers should have the right to organize in a union and bargain collectively.

"(4) Full benefits and health care rights: ... Migrant workers should have full access to social programs and benefits including Employment Insurance, workers' compensation, social services and settlement services, both by law and in practice. Migrant workers should also have access to health care. Employers are required to provide health insurance until migrant workers qualify for provincial health care; however, there is widespread non-compliance on the part of employers in fulfilling this responsibility.

"(5) Freedom from recruitment fees: ... During recruitment, migrant workers are often charged exorbitant fees. This is entirely unacceptable and employers should bear the cost of recruitment, which is a standard cost associated with running a business.

"(6) Housing rights: ... Employers frequently provide or help migrant workers to find housing during their employment. Housing and living conditions are too often inadequate. Every migrant worker should live in safe, sanitary and comfortable living conditions.

"(7) Mobility rights: ... Currently, migrant workers' work permits are tied to a specific employer. Work permits tied to sectors or provinces would provide workers with more freedom of mobility once they arrive in Canada.

"(8) Freedom from discrimination: All migrant workers should be free from all forms of discrimination including racism and sexism. This should include equal remuneration for all workers regardless of race, nationality or gender."

You can see that there are things that could have been added to this bill and considered by this bill that haven't been.

Speaker, these are not radical or revolutionary ideas. These are the rights that are naturally extended to us as Canadian citizens but denied to migrant workers during the time that they spend in our country every year. We know that Ontario has been falling behind when it comes to the number of immigrants who arrive in Ontario, and we are happy to see some action from this government on immigration issues, but we need to be very aware of the fact that this bill does not address many of the fundamental challenges newcomers face, nor does it reflect the typical low-wage migrant experience or confirm much in the way of protections.

We would ask that during the committee stage, the government consider some of the larger immigration

reforms that are needed, such as protections for migrant workers.

Thank you again to the member opposite for the opportunity to speak to this bill today, and to my colleague from London—Fanshawe for her work as the NDP critic for citizenship, immigration and international trade, and to the experts and stakeholders that have helped to inform all of our positions here today.

There is a significant opportunity for the government to make some real and meaningful changes to Ontario's immigration system, and I sincerely encourage them to take it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

L'hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Ça me fait grand plaisir de parler aujourd'hui au sujet du projet de loi 49 sur l'immigration en Ontario. Laissez-moi vous parler de l'importance de l'immigration en Ontario, et puis notre gouvernement bien sûr a mis de l'avant un objectif très ambitieux, qui est d'augmenter l'immigration francophone en Ontario.

Dans le projet de loi, on cite que notre objectif est d'avoir 5 % de l'immigration qui sont francophones. Présentement, c'est autour de 3 %. On a besoin de l'immigration francophone pour remplir des postes ici en Ontario, surtout dans le nord et le sud-ouest de l'Ontario. On a besoin de cette main-d'œuvre qualifiée, beaucoup dans le domaine de la santé mais aussi dans le domaine des métiers et dans le domaine de l'éducation dans le nord-ouest et le sud-ouest de l'Ontario.

Alors, on s'est donné cette cible de 5 %, et on devra travailler de très près avec le gouvernement fédéral parce que c'est eux finalement, avec Destination Canada, qui peuvent nous aider à attirer ces francophones ici en Ontario.

D'autres provinces, oui, accueillent des francophones, comme le Nouveau-Brunswick, le Québec et le Manitoba, mais en totalité c'est l'Ontario qui attire le plus de francophones. Les municipalités ont maintenant un portail où on peut annoncer les atouts de la municipalité pour attirer ces francophones-ci en Ontario, et nous travaillons en partenariat avec elles.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Dufferin—Caledon.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I'm pleased to add my comments to the member from Oshawa. She made passing reference to the fact that our immigration numbers coming to Ontario have been decreasing, but I think you have to look at the bigger picture to talk about why they've been decreasing. Certainly Bill 49, I hope, will be a step in the right direction to encourage more immigration to Ontario—the types of immigrants that we so desperately need to build our economy—but you can't look at this issue in a vacuum. The reality is that part of the reason we have fewer immigrants interested in coming to Ontario and setting up shop—working here—is, quite frankly, because our economy is in decline.

If we're not going to have government policies and government ideas that bring forward and grow our

economy, then how can we possibly expect people who are looking and have the opportunity, quite frankly, to go to any province in Canada, let alone other countries—why would they look to Ontario? We have jobs exiting this province.

All we have to do is look at what's happening in London, what's happening with some of the many manufacturing firms that have chosen to move their operations outside of Ontario. Bill 49 is a good first step, but we cannot look at these issues in a vacuum, because the reality is that if we're not building a strong economy, then there is no interest for people to move here, to set up here and to find jobs here.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I got kind of comfortable sitting beside the member from Oshawa when she was debating this bill, and she did a great job on it.

She touched on migrant workers, and that reminded me of an event that happened when I was first elected. Around 2012, there was a very serious accident. There was a van carrying migrant workers to their job location fairly early in the morning, and there was a collision. The interim chief coroner at the time, Dan Cass, reported it as one of the deadliest collisions that he investigated. I believe it was 10 migrant workers who passed away in that horrible accident.

Migrant workers and newcomers and immigrants who come to Canada come here to make a better life, to contribute to society and do better for themselves. There are different reasons why they come. But this act is going to encourage the occupational class of immigrants coming to Canada, to provide them with jobs so they can contribute to the economy.

That's a good thing in this bill, but we have to remember that we have to be creating those jobs for the people who are here, as well as for the new immigrants who come to Ontario, because there's nothing worse than having that expectation of coming to Ontario and having a living, and you're not able to survive, pay your bills and find affordable housing.

The member from Oshawa talked about how we need to have supports, as well, if we're encouraging immigration. We don't want to set them up for failure. We don't want to have an open-door policy for immigrants and then have them not succeed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

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Mr. Yvan Baker: It's a pleasure to speak to this bill. I have to say that as I debate this bill, I think back to stories my grandfather used to tell me about how he immigrated to Canada and what it was like back then. He talked about how, when he immigrated, which was just after World War II, there were a number of immigration interviews that he had to go through. In those days, Canada was concerned about attracting the kinds of workers who could fill the labour market of the day. In those days, one of the types of jobs that needed to be

filled was for the type of folks who were strong, who were handy, who could build some of the power lines, the hydro lines, that we benefit from today. That's what my grandfather did when he came to Canada; he did a lot of manual labour. He was a fit for the labour market of the day.

Nowadays, of course, the labour market has evolved, it has changed, the economy has evolved, and we need to make sure that our immigration policies are keeping up with that. We need to do that for a few reasons. First of all, it's important to our economy. It's critical that we do what we can to make sure that everybody who lives in Ontario has a chance at a job, has a chance at supporting their family, reaching their potential and contributing to the economy, which benefits us all. But it's also important to the people and the quality of life of the people involved. When I think about my grandfather, he was able to come to Canada, immigrate, settle, find a job and was able to support his family. I'm one of the beneficiaries of that. We need to make sure we're doing that.

There are many people in our country who come and, unfortunately, struggle to find a job. I can think of many people in my community of Etobicoke Centre who are in that position.

What I think is excellent about this piece of legislation is that it strengthens Ontario's ability to make sure that it's attracting the kinds of people who can settle in Canada, settle in Ontario successfully, achieve those jobs and achieve that potential that every Ontarian hopes for and deserves.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Oshawa has two minutes.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you very much to my colleagues for weighing in on my comments.

To the Attorney General, thank you for reminding us and highlighting the need to prioritize francophone immigration. I appreciated that she also mentioned that in order for this to go anywhere, the government has to work closely with the federal government. So I would encourage that to be a priority.

We know that the Premier and the Prime Minister haven't exactly been jumping at the opportunity to work together, but, hopefully, they can see a way forward when it comes to these issues.

To the member from Dufferin-Caledon, thank you very much for also echoing that we need to look at the bigger picture, focusing on some of the root causes.

Thank you also to the member from London-Fanshawe for her work as critic but also for weighing in.

To the member from Etobicoke Centre, thank you also for reminding us of our immigration history, where we started—well, not necessarily where we started, but a historical perspective and how that connects to today. You mentioned attracting immigrants who could do the work that we prioritize today. As I had mentioned in my remarks, as we see in the case pending in Ottawa, it's one thing to attract the immigrants to Canada to do the work that we prioritize, but it's just as important, or more so, to ensure that they have the supports in place to be successful while they are here. Anyway, that's a case to watch.

If I may, just in closing, I'd like to finish by reading an excerpt from the letter written by Julia Deans, the chair of the government's Expert Roundtable on Immigration: "Attracting and settling immigrants is not just the job of government; this is about nation building and we each have a role to play. From better defining our labour market needs to preparing newcomers, our recommendations emphasize the need for the provincial and federal governments to work together and with other sectors."

We know that there is a lot of work to be done. It's a step in the right direction. It addresses some important issues, but not all that it should to change the big-picture issues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Hon. Mario Sergio: Speaker, thanks for the time. I don't get too much time to get up on my feet and make some comments on some of the business we do in the House here. Before I run out of my five minutes, let me say that I'm going to share my time.

I thank the member across for the comments—

Miss Monique Taylor: Who are you sharing with?

Hon. Mario Sergio: I'm going to share my time with my seatmate, the Associate Minister of Finance.

Miss Monique Taylor: You can't do 10 minutes each?

Hon. Mario Sergio: Yes—

Interjection.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I only have five minutes, or less than that, and I want to address the positive comments that have already been made on the other side of the House, which is very nice. I think they understand the benefits of Bill 49. We are making comments on the second reading of this particular bill introduced by Minister Chan, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade. I think we all can relate to the importance of creating this particular bill, which is the Ontario Immigration Act, here in the province of Ontario.

I don't want to spend my five minutes, because I would need more than five hours, telling the story of who I am as an immigrant. I won't go there. I think we have to address the positive aspects of the bill. I hope that as the bill moves along we can indeed bring it back and make it even better. I hope that some of the comments that we hear from the other side will be incorporated and indeed make it a better bill. But it is important that we are going to have a bill made in Ontario, something that has integrity and the way we see it with respect to our workers. We're going to have all kinds of workers and employees. We will have the summertime employees, if you will, Speaker. We will have the professional people. They all will be subject, one way or another, to one form or another of either abuses or scams.

I think the legislation that is being proposed is proposed in such a way that indeed is going to offer the best of protection, not only for ourselves as a government, not only for our people, but for the immigrants who come here and want to have a fair system, want to

build their lives and want to contribute to our own Canadian and Ontario society.

Indeed, it calls for penalties as well because, in everything else, as we know, there are consequences “if.” First time, it’s \$150,000; repeated, it’s \$250,000 plus imprisonment and you have to face the law.

Bill 49 provides Ontario with the compliance and enforcement tools to ensure fairness and integrity in this so-called immigration system. We are addressing immigrants here, and as you know, we do need new immigrants. We are a young country and we need immigrants in the various aspects of our society.

How many immigrants do we receive on a regular, annual basis? In 2013 we received some 103,402 permanent resident immigrants, accounting for 40% of the total admissions to Canada. But Ontario’s share of permanent residents landing in Canada and coming to Ontario is diminishing. In 2006, we received some 50%, compared to 59% in 2001.

Among Ontario’s 2013 permanent residents, almost 47% were in the economic class—principal applicants, spouses and dependents as well. Some 37.8% were in the family class, and 12.2% were refugees, for a total of 12,600; and 3,800 were from other different classes.

Among the 18,700 principal applicants arriving from the economic class, 11,500 were skilled workers; 2,500 or 13.5% had some Canadian working experience; 2,600 or 14.4% were live-in caregivers; and some 7.4% or 1,400 were provincial nominees. I think there were another 3.6% which were from the business field—investors and so forth.

My time is already up but I would hope that my colleagues will continue to make a contribution by addressing the benefits of the bill, the merits of the bill and the positive side. I hope that we can move it along, bring it back and have a bill that indeed is going to be good for us and good for our new immigrants. I thank you, Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The Associate Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I’m very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 49. Like my seat-mate and colleague the minister responsible for seniors, I too am an immigrant. I came to this country in 1975 with my family. Through hard work and the excellent education system that we have in this province, I have really seen the value of how immigrants can achieve, because I’ve been able to do that myself.

It’s something that is part of my DNA, Speaker. I come from a family who chose this province and this country as the place they wanted to live and raise a family. This bill is very important to me, and I’m pleased to join in the debate for Bill 49, establishing the Ontario Immigration Act.

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As the minister has said, this bill is very important for newcomers and for employers. That is very important to Ontario’s economy because we know we need to attract the best immigrants to Ontario who help to support our

growing labour market needs. More importantly, passing Bill 49 would make Ontario more competitive by attracting skilled workers. We need to fill our labour force needs and grow our economy.

What we need to do, in fact, is to continue to lay out the welcome mat and ensure that when newcomers come here, they are able to settle quickly and succeed, just like my family and I had the opportunity to do all those many, many years ago.

One example of that is our internationally educated professionals. When they come to Ontario, they are hoping to find work in the field that they have studied in their homeland. They are bringing those skills and those opportunities here to us, but too often we know the story, that our highly skilled newcomers are not getting into their field quickly. They face barriers and hurdles that prevent them from getting into their field. Our government is committed to removing those barriers for internationally educated professionals to practise in their field. When we speak of Ontario putting out the welcome mat, this is exactly what we’re talking about.

In my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood, I am so pleased to work with a non-profit agency called Progress Career Planning Institute—and that is exactly what they do. They work with newcomers on some of our excellent programs like our bridging programs so that they are accelerating the pace at which newcomers can find work in their field and begin to establish themselves and their families.

Just two weeks ago, they had a conference called the foreign-educated professionals conference. Over 1,000 foreign-educated professionals came together at that conference to network with each other and learn about Canada’s labour market and Ontario’s labour market. These types of events and initiatives are very critical to ensuring that newcomers get into their field and begin working as quickly as possible.

We have many accomplishments and initiatives in this space. We have Global Experience Ontario. It’s a one-window information and resource centre that has served over 12,000 internationally trained individuals to date. We have HealthForceOntario, which has provided information, advice and programs to over 22,000 internationally trained health professionals. Our government was the first in Canada to bring forward fair-access legislation to ensure that registration practices are transparent, objective and fair.

We know there is still work that we need to do. One of the things that I notice when I go anywhere in the world is Canada’s reputation and Ontario’s reputation as an inclusive place, a place where we welcome people from all over the world. We’re known for that, Speaker. This legislation, Bill 49, will help to connect those realities in terms of the economic realities that are so critical to ensure that our internationally educated professionals are having the opportunities they deserve.

I really encourage all members of this House to support this vital bill, Bill 49, and keep Ontario’s economy and communities growing and prosperous.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: It's a pleasure again to rise and at least have an opportunity in my short two minutes to address Bill 49, An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991.

As we listen and as we observe what's going on in Ontario today, Ontario used to be—used to be—a place where immigrants would come, and they would bring their skill sets with them. We had jobs. It was affordable for them to come to Ontario and to participate and to become proud Canadians.

Well, unfortunately, Speaker, we're finding that the immigration rates into Ontario are in fact becoming less and less. Now, they may be going to other provinces within Canada to still become great and proud Canadians, but Ontario used to be the land of milk and honey. Well, unfortunately, since 2011 under this Liberal government, the Liberals have soured the milk and the honey has gotten hard. It's very, very unfortunate that that type of situation is in fact occurring—it is continuing to occur. That's a sad thing, because we want to be able to have opportunities for people.

My colleague from Dufferin—Caledon talked earlier about the fact that the more serious instances here—in order to welcome immigrants into Ontario, is the fact that we need to have good jobs. We need to have a stronger economy. The debt has, in fact, doubled since this government came into place. It once went from \$125 billion—which is when they came in, but it's now upwards of \$286 billion and getting higher. Well, unfortunately, that is forcing businesses out, and when the businesses go, the jobs go. When the jobs go, there's nothing for talented, skilled-set immigrants.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's my pleasure to comment on Bill 49 as it relates to some of the comments made by the minister of senior affairs and the Associate Minister of Finance. I'm very happy, actually, that the associate minister referenced the issue of education, because you'll remember, Mr. Speaker, this week that the Canadian Federation of Students, who are international students who are coming into this country, currently don't have access to health care. They have UHIP, and they have been lobbying this government for years now to have—if we're going to allow them to come into this country, if they're going to pay exorbitant, very high tuition rates, then they should actually have access to health care.

There's a young woman who sat in my office this week, and she's got two young children. And it was not clear to her, when she came into Ontario, that when she became a student in one of our post-secondary institutions, that when she went to the emergency room with a child with a huge fever, UHIP would not cover that. In fact, she had to pay \$870, which you'll know—as a student, they just don't have the money.

This piece of legislation, obviously, is long overdue. That's already been said about it. But a lot of the condi-

tions placed within it, of course, are contingent on federal co-operation or collaboration. The issue of the federal government allowing refugees, for instance, into this province, into this country, and not offering them health care services—I mean, they choose refugees and immigrants to come into this country based on their need of health care, and then they get to this country—it's a point of shame for us, as Canadians, to actually deny health care. It's a universal right, and it's something that every piece of legislation that comes through this House should be embedded in.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Hon. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure to stand in this House and speak about Bill 49, which is the Ontario Immigration Act. As we all know, this country and this province has been built—apart from the First Nations—by immigrants. We're all immigrants to Canada, including myself.

Wherever I go in this province—as Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and Minister of Research and Innovation, I visit our various academic institutions, training centres, also our research institutions—I see many Canadians who have not been born in Canada. They have been born out of Canada and they're making great contributions to our province and our country. We are very proud of those Canadians who make extremely important contributions to our province and our country, Canada.

We need to bring legislation for immigration whereby we can attract the best talents from every part of the world, every corner of the world to our province of Ontario. As we all know, immigration is a shared jurisdiction between provinces and the federal government. Unfortunately, the federal government hasn't been a great partner with us in Ontario over the past years, so that we couldn't attract as many talented people to Ontario from other countries in the past years. Hopefully, in the future, particularly by passing this bill, we will make a good collaboration and the federal government will make a good collaboration with Ontarians in terms of the selection of new immigrants to Ontario. For example, the provincial nominees for Ontario are far, far less than other provinces—far less than Quebec, far less than smaller provinces such as Alberta—and there's no need for it.

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Ontario is the largest province in this country, the largest jurisdiction in this country, and we need a good partner when it comes to immigration. We know that immigration is the key for the progress of this province, of this country.

I'm pleased to support this bill, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I'd like to speak to the Ontario Immigration Act, Bill 49. It is certainly a worthy piece of legislation in its intent, because the intent is to match the

people with skills who would immigrate here to the jobs that we have in Canada. That only makes good sense.

We are a land of immigrants in this country, as has been explained to us by the minister of innovation and colleges and trades, and he himself is an immigrant. All of our families, at some point in time in our history, if we go back a generation or two or many, even back to 400 years ago when the first French Canadians came here—we are all immigrants, and we all came here for the potential that this new and great land offered to us.

I'll give you a couple of examples why we need to match the needs of the country—what jobs we have vacant—to the skills that people would have to offer. Last year, in Ontario, we had 9,000 people graduate from teachers' college to fill 5,000 jobs. That is truly a mismatch and failure of our education system, I would say, because it makes for 4,000 very unhappy people who don't have a job. But they do have the debt of getting that education and have wasted—well, temporarily have wasted four years of their time. They might better have been educated in a field that matched a job at the end of their school time.

A different story that is a happy story for workers is at Cambrian College in Sudbury: 24 people graduated this year from their electrical technician/pole-climbing program, for 300 jobs. These are \$75,000-a-year jobs. So those are very happy students—unhappy employers.

That's where more people coming out of the education system, perhaps immigrant people, would be well matched to go to those kinds of colleges.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The minister responsible for seniors affairs has two minutes.

Hon. Mario Sergio: I want to thank the members who made a contribution on the debate: the members from Chatham-Kent-Essex, Kitchener-Waterloo, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, and Research and Innovation, and the member from Mississippi Mills as well. I want to thank them for their positive contribution to the debate, Speaker.

Let me say that people still want to immigrate to Canada and Ontario, Speaker, for a number of reasons in spite of—sometimes we think that there are difficulties. Of course, there are difficulties. You had your share. I don't know about you, Speaker, but I had mine, certainly. I came in 1958, when the infamous Avro Arrow airplane was cancelled, so I don't have to tell you the employment situation at that particular time in our history.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Tories did that too.

Hon. Mario Sergio: Yes, indeed.

But let me say, Speaker, where are they coming from? We're still getting people. In 2013-14, Speaker, we got some 15,000 people from India, 15,000 from China, 7,000 from Pakistan, 7,000 from the Philippines, 6,000 from Iran and 3,200 from the United States. What languages do they speak? It's 11% English, 7.3% Urdu, 7% Arabic, 7% Mandarin, Chinese and so forth.

Speaker, that is why we need this particular piece of legislation approved by this House: so we can indeed provide all the necessary protections to all the new and

old immigrants, if you will. I think we owe it to them. They want to come here to build their future. They want to make a contribution. I think the best thing that we can do is provide the necessary integrity within the law that offers them the possibility.

I thank you for your time, Speaker. You look good in the chair.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Jack MacLaren: I would like to speak to Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act. We are in agreement that Ontario needs to update its immigration policy. This bill contains provisions that do not respect our common-law rights; specifically, private property rights and the right to due process. This will inevitably lead to abuses of power.

About warrantless entry, Bill 49 gives inspectors, after having completed a course of training approved by the director, the authority to enter premises without a warrant. Warrantless entry, combined with other provisions in the bill that establish absolute liability, sizable penalties and the absence of proper appeals process, is an infringement upon our constitutional right to be secure against unreasonable search and seizure, as articulated in section 8 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is alarming how many bureaucrats have been provided with warrantless entry authority by this provincial government. If the inspector has reasonable grounds to suspect that someone is violating the law, what is the difficulty in obtaining a warrant?

As well, what type of training is contemplated for inspectors and investigators? For instance, will the training include the teaching of Canadians' common-law rights, as defined in our Constitution?

About the appeals process, section 8 of the bill allows the minister to cancel a registration in the employer or recruiter registry and inform the holder of the registration of the cancellation by letter. The only appeal set out in the bill is a request for an internal review, which has very few procedural protections for the requester in the bill.

When it comes to the appeals processes, we need to be very careful to protect people's rights and ensure that the provincial government is not given the opportunity to act arbitrarily and behind closed doors. We need a proper appeals process with effective oversight and accountability.

The process outlined in the bill for an internal review does not require the minister to share with the requester the specific charges or evidence that the minister relied on in the original determination. In fact, the minister is not obliged to reveal what, if any, evidence it possesses or uses during the cancellation process or the internal review process.

The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations regulating these matters, but is not required to do so. To adequately defend themselves, employers and recruiters should be provided with the specific charges and evidence being used by the minister in their determination and be given adequate time to reply.

Subsection 28(8) of the bill establishes a standard of absolute liability with respect to administrative penalties. Absolute liability means that the minister may fine a person or corporation up to \$150,000 per contravention, even if the person took all reasonable steps to prevent a contravention or had an honest and reasonable belief in a mistaken set of facts that, if true, would render the contravention innocent.

Again, a proper appeals process that protects the right of the accused is completely lacking in the bill. People need to be provided with an opportunity to avail themselves of a proper defence during a proper hearing with proper procedures to protect their rights if they are being fined. Where are the rights of due process?

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The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations governing the rights of the requester under a request, but is not required to do so. I would prefer to see due process rights in the legislation, as regulations can be more easily changed and do not come to this chamber for full and open debate.

About bureaucratic convenience, when the provincial government writes legislation for the convenience of bureaucrats, we are at risk of losing our common-law rights. I hope it is not the intent or case here, but I have my doubts, as we have seen this played out over and over again over the last 11 years in Ontario. It is not surprising to anyone who has studied history that bureaucracies with little or no legislative constraints placed on them have the potential to abuse their power. It is human nature; not that public servants are bad people, but that bad people are attracted to and desire power over others and will naturally be attracted to positions with minimal constraints on their behaviour.

That is why we need to be mindful and include legislative provisions in bills to protect the rights of Canadians and not continue to give bureaucrats increasing power over every aspect of our lives.

About immigrants, one of the best parts of my job is talking to people who have come to Canada from places all around the world and listening to their personal stories. It is awe-inspiring to hear people's stories of their escape from tyrannical countries run by corrupt officials in order to gain the liberty and freedom that Canada has to offer.

Unfortunately, what I hear from Canadian immigrants more and more these days is that Ontario is beginning to resemble the corrupt and tyrannical country that they were able to escape. Vast and ever-expanding bureaucracies are not compatible with liberty and freedom. Even worse are privatized bureaucracies that do not answer to the people through their elected representatives.

My point is that, as my colleagues have pointed out in previous speeches, Ontario has declining immigration due to high taxes, large deficits and debt, increasing red tape, diminishing economic opportunities, and high and soaring energy costs, but also because we in Ontario are losing our common-law rights in an unprecedented and continuing attack by this provincial government.

These issues are connected. Our common-law rights are the basis for Ontario's prosperity, albeit currently declining prosperity. Losing our rights will inevitably mean losing our prosperity.

Immigrants from despotic Third World and Communist countries know this. They understand that freedom forms the foundation of prosperity, which is why so many are willing to leave behind everything they know to come to Canada for freedom and prosperity, to build a better life for their families and themselves. They don't understand why we in Ontario would so casually fritter away what most of the world's population can only dream of.

In conclusion, if we don't reverse this trend, in the long run there may not be a need for an Ontario immigration policy, and that would be sad. Ontario has so much to offer. It would be a shame if immigrants decided to reject Ontario and settle in more friendly provinces because the Ontario provincial government demolished the very rights and freedoms that attract immigrants to Canada to begin with.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Ms. Cindy Forster: This afternoon I actually had an opportunity to meet with the Canadian Federation of Students. This kind of feeds right into this bill that is before us because they're interested in equitable health care access for international students. They say that international students pay somewhere between \$700 and \$2,000 a year for what is called UHIP. Unfortunately, it's not really a universal system. Many hospitals aren't enrolled in it; many physicians aren't enrolled in it.

They gave me an example of one international student who became pregnant while she was here, going to university in Toronto. She didn't have any access to obstetrical care in the city of Toronto, so imagine what happens in the rest of the province. We've got these international students who are paying \$20,000 a year in tuition fees, and on top of that, they're paying \$700 to \$2,000 a year for health care that they can't access in the city where they are actually going to school.

I have to mention that it was the Tory government back in 1994 that actually eliminated OHIP for international students. That itself became a problem for students. Now we have the university actually putting in a health care plan, but I don't even know where those premiums are going. Are they going into the university coffers, or are they actually going into the government coffers?

There are other examples in BC and Manitoba where we are treating our international students to more fair and equitable health care access.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Mike Colle: I appreciated the comments by my colleague from Carleton-Mississippi Mills on this new bill on immigration. I would just like to say that—

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: You didn't hear them.

Mr. Mike Colle: I was watching on television, so be quiet.

Interjections.

Mr. Mike Colle: Deputy Speaker, the thing I wanted to say, in terms of the comments from our colleague here, is that immigration is critically important to Ontario. I think we all forget that almost every year, about 100,000 immigrants make Ontario home. That's 100,000 every year. So 100,000 come this year, and we have to ensure that they're properly integrated in society with jobs, with housing, with education, with health care. Then, on January 1, another 100,000 come. It never stops. So it's critically important to have tools in place in Ontario so we can best accommodate these immigrants, because it is extremely challenging for cities, communities, workplaces and schools to make sure that newcomers fit in. That's why we need more say in immigration in Ontario, so that we can do a better job of ensuring that newcomers get an equal opportunity so they can contribute to the economy and to the community they choose as their new home.

That's all I have to say, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you. And thanks for helping me out; I appreciate it.

The member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm glad to add to this debate, with questions and comments, and I thank my fellow colleague from Carleton—Mississippi Mills for speaking today.

He actually exemplifies why we need to continue debate on so many bills that this government wants to shut down. It's been quite outrageous, the number of bills this government has decided to split the speaking times between their members for five or 10 minutes, and the next time rise and say, "So many speakers have spoken," and shut down debate on the opposition side of the house.

The fact is, he has stood up and brought out new issues that haven't been debated on this floor. I think it's quite responsible and important to ensure that we continue this debate. Now that they're on the floor, we can have further discussion about them. But my fear is that this government is going to stand up in the next minute or two and shut down debate like they have with the agriculture bill and the Ontario pension plan etc. We're quite concerned about that.

Congratulations to the member for bringing this forward. The gist of his point is the fact that Ontario is losing too many jobs. Ontario is not a place of opportunity anymore. It makes it tougher for immigrants not only to come to this province but to stay in this province. Unfortunately, too many people are heading west who should be staying in this province. It's not just immigrants who leave; it's people who have been in Ontario for years. I can tell you that a number of my nieces and nephews have headed west due to the fact that there's no opportunity for these young folks here.

1710

What the government needs to focus on—and I wish they would focus on it—is putting together an economic plan that would actually cut the waste, cut the overspending and create an economic environment that is positive

for investment in this province. Unfortunately, they're headed in the wrong direction. You can see it with their deficit, which is climbing, at \$12.5 billion. They are obviously not even on target to balance this budget, and until they actually take seriously the effects of what they are doing to this province, it's going to be tougher for immigrants and Ontarians and Canadians to stay in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: I was listening very closely to the member from Carleton—Mississippi Mills because I was sitting in the chair, and it felt pretty good, I just want to say.

But if you listened to him, he planted the seed of fear around Bill 49, which is a really interesting technique that politicians are starting to use to motivate legislation in this country and, quite honestly, in this province. I'm referencing, of course, Bill C-51, which the member would know.

Bill C-51 has wide-sweeping powers gift-wrapped in rhetoric which is positioned around fear, and based on stereotypes as well. The laws already exist in this country to deal with terrorist threats. Quite honestly, I have to say, if you think about the Toronto 18 and the VIA Rail terror plots, there are measures in place. So I think it's really interesting that he has referenced the fear of government in this, because I can tell you that there are many European and new immigrants in this country who have a growing fear of Stephen Harper and Bill C-51 because it is heralding a whole new era of fear in this country, which goes against the very nature of what it means to be Canadians. I must tell you that our leader Thomas Mulcair has been very clear about our position on Bill C-51. It's not necessary; it compromises our democratic rights; it shifts the nature of our culture in this province and in this country.

I just want to red-flag that use of fear to manipulate and to introduce a whole new kind of rhetoric around any kind of bill.

This bill, at its heart, is a fairly good bill. It needs work, but we shouldn't be afraid of it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Carleton—Mississippi Mills has two minutes.

Mr. Jack MacLaren: There is nothing to be afraid of except ourselves. We make rules in this place that intrude into people's lives sometimes. Warrantless entry is one of these heinous things that comes out of this place far too often, which means government can come into our place of work or home at will, without any evidence or reason. That is wrong and that is unconstitutional, and that is what we need to be afraid of: bad government. That is unfortunate.

People come here because we're the best country in the world. I know people in my community who say their parents came from Yugoslavia or Slovakia and crawled across the fields so the guards couldn't shoot at them and things like that. Another person in my riding association, his father was a boat person from Vietnam. He escaped with his life and has prospered in this country.

They do not prosper because of the regulations and controls of this country. They prosper because of the opportunity and the freedom, and that's what we must fight for and we must be diligent about protecting, as the people who are elected by the people of this province, the 107 persons who are on guard for the freedom of the people of Ontario.

The immigrants are the strength and the backbone of this land, and we want to keep it that way, because without them—well, Ontario and Canada is nothing but its people, and all of its people are or were immigrants at one time. In my riding, there are a lot of new Canadians, and I've just found them a wonderful group of individuals, very inspiring, there for all the right reasons, often very educated, very much achieving, very appreciative of this wonderful land they are in and of the freedom and opportunities they have within which they can prosper themselves, for their families and for their communities. They are great Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker. Once again, I'm always pleased to stand in this House on behalf of the residents of Hamilton Mountain.

Over the past three and a half years, I have to say that one of the best aspects of my job is the many opportunities that I've had to experience the wide diversity of people in Hamilton Mountain and throughout our city. Before being elected, I fully enjoyed participating where I could, in various ethnic and cultural celebrations. Over the years, I've made many friends as a result. But as an MPP I'm especially privileged to receive many invitations to countless events and discussions from a wide array of groups and individuals, learning more each time about what brought new Canadians to our country and what they bring to our community.

Today we are debating the proposed Ontario Immigration Act put forward by the government. I have to say it's about time. What I think we have here with Bill 49 is a step in the right direction—a small step but nonetheless a step that finally recognizes that Ontario can play a role when it comes to immigration issues.

The Liberals have been in power now since 2003. That's 12 years that it took them to move on this file. In that time, it appears that things have actually gotten worse—worse for immigrants and worse for our province. Those 12 years could have been better spent addressing some of the issues related to immigration and to the situation faced by newcomers to Ontario. So it has taken a while to get moving on this, but like I said, it's better late than never.

Since Europeans first came to this land, immigration has been a key element of our growth as a nation. It's as true now as it was 200 years ago. Today, as was pointed out by the Expert Roundtable on Immigration, it is estimated that Ontario will face a shortage of 364,000 skilled workers by 2025. As our population ages over the coming years and people leave the workforce, we cannot come close to replacing those people without a signifi-

cant influx of people of working age from other countries. In fact, the round table also stated that immigration would need to be increased by 250% to offset that decline.

In my hometown of Hamilton, we have a group called the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council that has said, "Without immigration, Hamilton will witness a declining and aging population, a smaller workforce and diminishing tax base." But over the past number of years, Ontario has experienced a drop of almost a third in its share of immigrants coming to Canada. In 2001, over 59% of immigrants to Canada came to Ontario; but in 2011 that figure dropped to 40%.

As I mentioned, we're facing an ever-increasing shortage of skilled workers. To fill those jobs, we need those people we call economic immigrants: people selected for their skills and their ability to contribute to our economy. But again, the percentage of people in this category has been falling in Ontario. In 2001, 64% of Ontario immigrants were economic immigrants; in 2011, that had fallen to 52%.

If we look at the actual numbers, it's even more startling. In 2001, 89,079 economic immigrants came to Ontario; but in 2011, only 36,939 in the same category settled here. That's a decrease of about 60% in 10 years. In Hamilton, between 2003 and 2008, only 41% of immigrants were in the economic class, significantly lower than the equivalent figures for Ontario and Canada for the same period. This comes at a time when Hamilton is seeing a rapidly changing economy that requires a different skill set from our previous needs.

This Ontario Immigration Act is specifically designed to increase the percentage of economic immigrants. For example, following the round table on immigration's target of increasing the number of immigrants through the provincial nominee program to 5,000, this bill attempts to set those targets. The problem is that the federal government still has the power over immigration matters, and there is no guarantee that Ontario will be able to set those targets. The attempt is in the bill, but there is no guarantee.

1720

I had a constituent contact my office a couple of months back. This was an employer who wanted to bring three people into Canada who had a particular skill—a skill that was not widely held in Canada—through the provincial nominee program. Each of these positions would have resulted in three other jobs for local people. She was having a problem getting her application processed and was looking for some assistance.

When we looked into it, we found out the reason that the application could not be processed was because the target for 2014, which was 2,500, had been reached a couple of months previously, and the federal government had not yet told the province what the target would be for 2015. Although the provincial nominee program was still accepting applications, there was nothing that could be done with them until the federal government set a new target and started accepting applications from the province.

We were told that it would take months before she could get the workers she needed. These were workers she knew—she knew their names and she knew their skills. She knew the immediate demands on her business, and she knew these were the people who would enable her to respond to that demand, people who would enable her to take her company up a level and provide work for nine other people in the Hamilton area.

The Expert Roundtable on Immigration said, "Making the immigration system work better for Ontario requires a renewed partnership between the provincial and federal governments." As we've heard, Speaker, how true that is.

The province of Quebec, for years, has had a significant influence on immigration and immigration policy, but Ontario has been left behind.

I had a look at some of the annual reports of the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council and noted the following paragraph in the message from the chair—a similar paragraph is included each and every year. I'll read it now: "I must acknowledge the work of our many partners—the government of Canada, the city of Hamilton and the many individuals, organizations and institutions that participated in our work." Some of the members may have noticed that what is normally a key partner in public policy work is missing, and that is the government of Ontario. I'm pretty sure that that omission is not due to an oversight, a mistake or an intentional slight against the government. No, it's simply a reflection of what has been happening over the years in communities across this province.

The provincial government has not been a partner with other levels of government when it comes to immigration, and it's time for that to change.

The importance of bringing new immigrants to our communities is only one part of the equation. We also have an equally—and probably more—important role to play when it comes to matters of immigrant settlement.

We need to make sure that those people we attract are able to contribute fully and allow them to meet their full potential. Sadly, that's not always the case. If we look at average incomes, immigrants, and especially recent immigrants, earn significantly less than Canadian-born workers. Figures from a few years ago published by the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council give us an average income of about \$55,000 for those born in Canada. For the immigrant population, it drops to around \$40,000, and for recent immigrants it's only about \$22,000. These numbers are quite consistent with averages for Ontario as a whole.

The council also points out that these differences in income between Canadian-born workers and immigrants increase with the skill level and education.

The number of highly qualified immigrants who are not working in fields they are trained in is disgraceful. I know many people who are scraping together a living in precarious work, such as driving taxis, yet they have excellent professional qualifications. We are doing them, and ourselves, a disservice by not giving them the opportunity to put their skills, education and experience to its best use.

Unfortunately, this bill does not address these issues, nor does it address some of the fundamental challenges new immigrants face when they arrive here. Affordable housing is one example—a problem, for sure, for many Ontarians, but particularly so for immigrants.

So, yes, Speaker, I support this bill. As I said, it's a start that's long overdue, but it could do a lot better. I hope we can get it to committee and we can amend it to address some of the more serious issues facing our immigrants.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: It gives me great pleasure to speak for a couple of minutes and make some comments to the member from Hamilton Mountain on this immigration bill. I've heard from the other side, both parties, supporting this, which is great, but I also hear that we need to do some tweaking, some changes and so forth. So I hope that they'll bring those potential changes or those expectations to committee—because, frankly, I haven't heard them during their debate time—to make any suggestions as to what should be there.

They talk about what's not there, that we forgot about, but I haven't heard any specific suggestions. I hope by the time it gets to committee, they bring that to the table, because I think, as an immigrant—and I will speak to that a little bit.

I came to Canada when I was 12, and I think my mother and father took a bit of a leap of faith. Although we had relatives here, you leave a country where you were born and the rest of your immediate family is there. It's quite an undertaking. But they adapted to this country.

The challenge? Times change. The immigrants of my generation, when we came here, filled those much-needed—in my family's case, construction, that my father and so forth embarked on. But those things have changed today, Speaker. We need to make sure that, as we move forward, we work in collaboration with the federal government, because after all, that's their responsibility: to make sure that immigrants who come to Ontario will have the right fit so that they can have those proper jobs, so they can have those good jobs for them and their family.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: It's a privilege to rise to comment on the comments from the member from Hamilton Mountain. It's a program that's needed in this country. We have to, I guess, update ourselves to the recent federal regulations that are all around putting a system in place that attracts the best new Canadians to our province.

It's unfortunate that we're having a hard time to attract them to Ontario because of the lack of good jobs. We're finding, yes, we have a large number come to Ontario every year, but they're leaving in droves as they're forced—if they want to find employment and be able to support a family and buy a home and live the life that our

ancestors have very much grown accustomed to, they have to leave the province looking for a good job. It's unfortunate that we've seen this happen over the last decade or so.

I think our member from Kitchener—Conestoga talked about how the numbers are dropping in Ontario, and by a fairly significant factor, where all the other provinces are actually increasing. It's no secret why; it's because of the better opportunities that are elsewhere. It's a sad statement on our history because we were always the province that attracted people, gave them the best opportunities to come, work hard, get a good job and really settle and add to our communities and our economy.

But that's changed, and we see them—we're attracting bright, smart new Canadians, but when they get here, they quickly see that the opportunities are elsewhere, and they're going there. It's not a statement of people not wanting to come here. But they're coming here with the idea of contributing. The best place to contribute is when you have a good job.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: The member opposite mentioned that he doesn't hear any suggestions from this side of the House. One of the things we've observed is it has taken 10 years for this bill to come to the House. Over a 10-year time, there should have been some suggestion-building by this government to put in this bill so that it would be more of an effective bill.

The premise of the bill is a good step forward. It's going to accomplish opening up the idea to immigration. But as we know, a lot of this bill requires a federal buy-in. A suggestion is that getting a federal buy-in would have been a great way to make this bill stronger, as opposed to leaving it kind of flying in the wind without that guarantee that the federal government is going to have buy-in on that.

1730

The other thing that I'd like to address is that there's a provision in there—again, it's not a commitment that's being made in this bill. The word says that it "allows," so it allows the minister to establish a registry for both employers and recruiters so that they can be monitored. It doesn't make it a requirement. That's a suggestion I would bring to the table: to require employers and recruiters to have a registry. Other provinces have this policy in place and it's been working very well. What it does is, it makes the employer and the recruiter liable for their decisions, with maybe fines attached to that as well.

I'm looking forward, when it does go to committee, that we hear from new deputants. That's where the true, on-the-ground work and suggestions come from, to make this bill stronger.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to speak to you about Bill 49 today, the Ontario Immigration Act.

You've heard the argument made that Ontario needs to chart its own course when it comes to attracting more

skilled labour. We know that immigrants have helped to drive our economy. Imagine what our province would look like without the millions of people who have come here to help build our province and to add to the strength of our economy.

My own family are immigrants from southern Italy, just like my colleague beside me. My parents came here in 1957 when they were in their early 20s. My father, two days after arriving, went to work in construction. My mother, a few days after that—and she was three months pregnant at the time—got a job at a dry cleaners at the corner of Yonge and Sheppard. It was called Pete's Cleaners. She worked there for 18 years. After that she cleaned houses and she worked in factories. They essentially did the kind of work that other people did not want to do.

We know that after the war, in the GTA, more than one million Italians settled in the area and they helped to build the city. That's just one ethnic group.

I want to touch specifically, though, on the provincial nominee program. We know that Ontario nominees have been more successful in establishing themselves economically when compared to immigrants residing in Ontario selected either through other PNPs or by the federal government. Here are some very important stats: We know that 98% of survey respondents say that they'll stay in Ontario; 99% of the respondents with a job offer are working in Ontario and most are still with their employer. Almost all say that they're really happy with their life here in the province, so we want to continue that.

Immigrants are so vital to this province. They help to build our economy. Along with a great public education system and skills training, I believe that this proposed legislation is going to be part of our economic plan for creating jobs now and in the future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Hamilton Mountain has two minutes.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you to the member from Northumberland—Quinte West and his suggestions that New Democrats can give you ideas and you would think about bringing them into incorporation of the bill to make it better. Well, New Democrats have been doing that for years. The Liberals decide to push things forward. They know best. They don't want to listen to anybody else. Hopefully you will have the ear of your minister there and be able to make sure that New Democrats have a say in the bill that's coming forward, because we, like you, have constituents who face troubles. We know that we can help make that better for everyone if we work together.

Thanks to the members from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, London—Fanshawe, and Kitchener Centre. The member from Kitchener Centre talked about the provincial nominee program and the benefits that could have for people in the province. Yes, it definitely has a benefit. But we need to urge the federal government to make sure that they're talking to the province, to make sure that the situation that I spoke about with my constituent doesn't continue to happen when they're working

so hard to bring jobs into my community and yet they're being stopped in their tracks because the governments aren't speaking together.

There's definitely a lot of work that can be done on this bill. The member from London—Fanshawe talked about the recruiting process between the employers and the employees and how that can make it better.

There are so many people in my riding who would benefit from such a program to be enacted. Many a day I talk to taxi drivers. I talk to people in fast food. I talk to so many new immigrants to our country. They're doctors and they're professional engineers and they're professors, and they have so many great skills that are just being wasted here in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Further debate.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm pleased to add my voice to this discussion on the Ontario Immigration Act. My ancestors came over here from Scotland almost 150 years ago. Canada is a country of immigrants who have come here and taken over a very rough territory. They left something that was very rough in Europe, in my ancestors' case, and were able to come over here and turn Canada into what it is today.

Over the years, we've welcomed immigrants, new Canadians coming through, and it has been a very positive experience for the vast majority of people. We've turned around and have been able to be a positive experience back to the world itself. We look forward to an act that actually continues to encourage our growth.

As we proceed through this debate, it is very important to keep in mind that any power our province gets regarding immigration is lent to us by the federal government. Unlike with Quebec, all other provincial nominee programs can be stopped at any time by the federal government.

The provinces can select a minimum number of candidates for immigration and issue them a nomination certificate that allows applicants to submit an application to Citizenship and Immigration Canada. There, all applicants, including all provincial nominees, are screened against criminal- and health-related inadmissibility before being granted permanent residence.

Canada is held in high regard around the world. We are seen as prosperous, tolerant, welcoming and fair. Prior to Minister Jason Kenney's tenure as the federal Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and the Minister for Multiculturalism, the immigration backlog resulted in many prospective immigrants waiting close to a decade to see their application processed. The long-term commitment these workers made to see their Canadian dream come true is a mark of how attractive Canada is for people who want to work, live freely and enjoy the fruits of their labour.

Today the immigration system is nimbler, faster, fairer and more responsive to the needs of employers and skilled workers. Under express entry, prospective immigrants can create an online profile outlining their skills and eligibility for Canadian immigration and register

with the Canada Job Bank. Employers can then find the best potential employees and select them, regardless of the order in which the applications are received. Immigrants are also ranked in the general pool of applicants according to their skills, education and experience, with the top-scoring candidates receiving an invitation to apply.

Only two trump cards exist in today's system: a labour market impact assessment and a provincial nomination. These give candidates sufficient points to rank at the top tier of applicants and all but guarantee an invitation to apply.

Before I remark on the provincial nomination, allow me to outline what kind of bureaucratic competition the provincial nomination program is up against. The impact assessment is granted by Employment and Social Development Canada to employers who want to bring an immigrant to fill a position that no suitable Canadian residents have applied for. It costs \$1,000. Employers can recover this fee from the employee, and the assessment is processed in 10 business days. Once a positive LMIA is granted, the prospective immigrant enters it into their express entry profile and waits for the next round of invitations. The federal side of the express entry program takes 10 business days and the \$1,000 is paid by the employer.

The provincial nominee program for Ontario is divided into two steps. In the first, the employer applies for a pre-screening similar to the LMIA, providing proof of attempted recruitment of Canadians and Canadian permanent residents. Once approval is granted, an individual then pays either \$1,500 or \$2,000 to receive the official provincial nomination. The whole process can take 90 days for each step, or about six months in total. Simply put, the current provincial program costs about twice as much as the federal one and takes about 10 times as long. Quebec's program, by contrast, costs \$765, and the Alberta one is free.

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The cost of the program isn't the only factor where Ontario is less competitive than the other provinces. The number of spots available to Ontario provincial nominees is stuck at 2,500 per year because many new immigrants leave Ontario to find work, or better work, in the western provinces.

Good immigration policy hinges on attraction and retention. Toronto and Ontario have the potential to attract the best and the brightest; however, we are not utilizing it. We have a multilingual and highly skilled workforce that makes us capable of doing business with every other country and industry in the world. Our immigration system is much simpler, quicker and fairer than that of our neighbours to the south. We have an excellent reputation for tolerance, inclusion and ease of integration. Canada is the highest-ranking G8 member in the Global Peace Index, a testimony to peace, order and good government.

However, our cost of living is rising. The government may not want to acknowledge the problem; however,

successful businesses are being put on the brink of bankruptcy by increasing power rates, and residential power is increasingly unaffordable.

The government is mulling a carbon tax, which would make all goods, including food, more expensive. The proposed Ontario Retirement Pension Plan will decrease the take-home pay of Canadians and permanent residents alike.

Immigrants come to Ontario to improve their lot and realize their dreams. With a string of economically damaging policies, this government is slowly sucking the energy and the drive out of the Ontario dream.

Why should a prospective immigrant choose Ontario when they know the Wynne government is strapped for cash and seeking new revenue tools? Many immigrants leave behind realities where graft and lawlessness take away the reward for a hard day's work and their certainty of a better tomorrow. It is up to us as legislators to ensure that Ontario can clearly and enthusiastically offer them the confidence that they can build a better, freer, richer life in Ontario than anywhere else in Canada. We can achieve this by saying clearly, "We stand by your success and we are proud of it, and we commit to doing everything in our power to make sure your hard work can achieve more."

But the Liberals aren't doing this. Bill 49 will create employer and prospective employee registries, and create an enforcement framework. However, a registry is of no use if there aren't jobs to fill it. If the government continues on this course of higher taxes and reckless spending, Bill 49 will not make the difference for future Ontarians. Faced with the prospect of high provincial program costs, long delays and an uncompetitive business environment, skilled workers will look elsewhere for the opportunity to make their dream a reality.

We look at the cost of this program—and we're going to require a bureaucracy. We can just hope that we can deviate from our past practice and encourage the government to make sure that any bureaucracy is effective and efficient, and provides good oversight. But we will not get our fair share of economic immigrants because we just don't have the jobs.

We see companies now that are leaving—not going out of business but moving. Some of them are moving out west; many of them are moving to the south. If you're going to have a program run properly—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Member from Davenport.

Mr. Jim McDonell: —jobs, you have to have jobs to register, and that's a problem we're having.

It's funny. I got a call today from the local newspaper asking what my version of a good job was. A good job is a good-paying job; it's a job with a future, a job where you're allowed to work and progress through the company and actually one day aspire to lead the company. Unfortunately, that's a problem here. We're seeing too many minimum wage jobs. This government seems to be concerned more about providing more around minimum

wage than we are looking at trying to develop jobs that people actually aspire to and can actually pay good taxes and help bring the economy along. As everybody knows, when you're in a minimum wage job, the taxes you're paying are very minimal at best, and likely you don't have the benefits that many of us have and enjoy.

I think the focus of this government should be around, yes, creating a good framework. But it won't work if we don't have the jobs available for the employers to actually take advantage of it by registering and pulling in people so it actually can work. We hope that that will change. We hope that Ontario will have a comeback. I believe there has to be a change of government, but we'll see what happens.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to stand in this House, today to speak about an issue that's been very important to Ontario throughout its history, and that's immigration—and also to respond to the member from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry. I listened intently to his speech, and he made some good points. In many cases, Ontario's reputation is not as bright for immigration as it once was.

But I would disagree: There are jobs—this bill, if done correctly, and if the government is actually serious—particularly in agriculture. We have a shortage of people to work in many agricultural occupations. And we're not talking about what some people think, that agriculture is having your hands on a fork. That's not what we're talking about, because those jobs don't exist, really, anymore. It's very technological, but we have a shortage of a lot of those skilled trades.

If we take this bill seriously—but, once again, it's a small step. What we're hoping is that the government actually takes it seriously and makes it more than a press release. It is going to create bureaucracy. The member previous made a good point: There's a difference between just creating bureaucracy for the sake of it and actually creating regulations that work. We're not anti-regulation, where regulations serve a purpose and aren't just there for the sake of regulation.

As the son of immigrants and as someone who's married to an immigrant—and immigration is one thing that most of us in this room all know about, because we are all either immigrants, children of immigrants, or third or fourth generation. It's an issue that we should all have something to say about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments.

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, I can't tell you how pleased I am to stand up here in the House today and talk about the importance of Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act.

First of all, I want to start out by making clear that our diversity in this province is our strength, because the newcomers of this province are the driving force behind our economy and are the driving force when it comes to ensuring that we have a future globally. What they are

able to do is not only bring the skills that we need right here in Ontario, but they are also able to make those unique connections with other economies around the world so that Ontario can be a leader not just here in Canada but also in the world.

Let me just tell you why I think this piece of legislation is important. It is important because, right off the bat, it establishes a vision. It makes sure that we make clear that our newcomers are important and that we have a vision that allows for them and their skills to be recognized.

Right now, there is a situation where the federal government is making decisions about who comes and what kinds of skills they bring to the table. Ontario has very, very specific needs. We need to be able to be on the ground, see where those needs are and react as quickly as possible in order to make sure that we are getting the workers where we need them. It doesn't do Ontario any good, for example, to have oil workers or other kinds of professions come in where we don't have the need when it comes to jobs. We need skilled workers. We don't want to waste those skilled workers' trades and abilities. We need to put them to work. I can't tell you in any stronger terms how important this is.

1750

The measures laid out in this bill will be critical for laying the groundwork for this province to operate a more comprehensive and effective immigration program now and in the years ahead. We understand and we all need to agree that immigration is a shared responsibility. Provinces have an important role to play. Selection is extremely important, and Ontario needs that ability.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: It's a pleasure to add my comments to those from the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry on his excellent presentation on Bill 49. As I was listening to his overview, it strikes me that Bill 49 is the closest that we have this week to any kind of economic, financial legislation, and, to borrow a phrase, it's pretty thin gruel.

If this is the closest that the Liberal government has to an economic policy, to an idea to generate some economic activity in the province of Ontario, we're on pretty shaky ground. While Bill 49 is baby steps and can be useful, ultimately we have to have a larger discussion about how we're actually going to turn the Ontario economy around.

We have an opportunity right now with the lower Canadian dollar compared to our largest trading partner, but, quite frankly, the government is not reacting and responding to it. We see that with the initiatives and the legislation that we've been debating this week, and they're talking about what they want to focus on. It has nothing to do with building Ontario's economy to actually encourage job creators to stay here, because we've seen the departures where they're moving to other jurisdictions because they actually have government and

economic policies that make sense for them to move to a different jurisdiction—hydro costs; you name it.

We can do better. If Bill 49 is their idea of a financial initiative that's going to build Ontario's economy, we really need to do a better job.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm glad to comment on the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry's debate that he talked about.

We need help on populating Ontario. There's a decline in population. We know that in the year 2030, the proportion of seniors is going to be far higher than our youth, so we need to fill that gap.

Part of that plan or part of that strategy should be encouraging immigrants to Ontario. Yes, the occupation class is a great way to fill in that skills gap that we keep talking about, so that's something to look forward to. But, Speaker, there are things in this bill—it's a vision that the member opposite mentioned. It's a 10-year vision in the making.

One of the things that we could look at putting in this bill to make things better when immigrants arrive here, if we're encouraging them to come, is—I had a constituent who had some trouble with ID. I don't know if other MPPs hear about this, but oftentimes it's a struggle to get ID as a new Canadian, a newcomer to Canada. What we have found in this particular situation is that the federal government wasn't speaking to the provincial government about the ID that the federal government had. The provincial government expected a specific form in its place. The person couldn't obtain the form that they wanted, so it was really tying their hands.

The other piece that's not in this legislation—it doesn't address it, if we're encouraging immigrants to come to Canada—is credentials. We need to match their credentials to the jobs that people are coming to fill. We hear those stories that there are doctors and engineers coming to Canada, and those credentials don't match our standards of education when they get here and they are underemployed in this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry has two minutes.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I want to thank the speakers from Timiskaming–Cochrane, Halton, Dufferin–Caledon and London–Fanshawe. They raised some good points.

I think the member from Timiskaming talked about jobs being available, and he's right. There are jobs available. New Canadians are coming to Ontario, settling in something that maybe is not the job that most people will want, but then they're looking around and seeing that they can move out west, go to a better job, and they're moving.

We saw from the member from Kitchener–Conestoga where he gave the stats for how our numbers are dropping where every other province's are increasing.

The member for Halton talked about diversity being our strength, and it is our strength. It has been our

strength for 150-some years or 200 years, and we need to continue to build on that.

We also talked about vision, and unfortunately visions don't feed families. When people come here, they need more than a vision. They need a good job. We have a program that will match skills with skilled jobs, but we don't have the skilled jobs. That's the problem. We have an abundance of skilled labour that would like to come here but no skilled jobs.

Dufferin—Caledon talked about the thin legislation. You're right; it's not doing anything for the economy. We've got to do something that creates the jobs so that it would allow us to welcome people in to take them.

London—Fanshawe talked again about the same thing: matching credentials with jobs. But it's the jobs that we're lacking. It's a common theme.

I go back to my riding of Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, where we lost many jobs in manufacturing during this government's tenure. I know a number of people who are commuting out west. They fly out, work for three weeks and fly back. It's unfortunate. I only know one person who's doing something similar and flying to northern Ontario. There would be more of them doing that, but there are no jobs there. People are flying out to our neighbours because they have jobs. They've managed the economy properly.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Correctional Services and Community Safety. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant has five minutes to reply.

The member from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Randy Hillier: I don't see the minister. I'm not sure who I'm putting this question to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The parliamentary assistant, I'd imagine.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Where is the parliamentary assistant?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): That's your problem. You can go ahead.

Mr. Randy Hillier: All right. My question this morning was clear regarding the need for immediate and decisive action by the Premier to deal with the OPP investigation. I referenced the damage that the Premier's action is causing Ontario and the reputation and integrity

of Ontario. I referenced a couple of cases, and I'll provide a little bit more detail for everyone's benefit.

Last June, a Ministry of Labour health and safety inspector was charged for extortion and breach of trust. He was put on administrative leave. He now also faces additional charges of breach of trust, extortion and accepting a benefit from a person dealing with government. Those are serious matters, but the public service dealt with them immediately and placed that individual, Joseph Ah-Hone, on leave.

The same thing happened just a little while ago with the Ontario Realty Corp. Three members of the Ontario Realty Corp.—Micheale DePace, Kathy Pagliaroli and Gino Conicella—were charged with breach of trust and accepting a secret commission. They were put on administrative leave immediately when those charges came forward. It's interesting to note that the minister responsible for the ORC at that time was Kathleen Wynne, our present Premier.

It's also interesting that, in 2009, the Ontario government spent more than \$23.4 million on outside lawyers and consultants, trying to recoup money from alleged corruption at the Ontario Realty Corp., but they collected \$3.5 million. It cost them \$23 million to do that.

Then, of course, I referenced this morning the latest one with the Ontario Provincial Police Association. We know, once again, that three members of the Ontario Provincial Police Association are facing investigation. Immediately, two of those members stepped aside; a third was placed on administrative leave while those allegations are being investigated.

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The parallels are quite, quite similar. They are a mirror of what's happening with the allegations of Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed. We can see, Speaker, each and every time the public service or others, when faced with allegations from an authoritative body, immediate action was taken to limit the damage, harm and injury to Ontario's democratic institutions, our rule of law and the administration of government.

We have allegations from another authoritative body, this time the Chief Electoral Officer. But what we have seen is obstruction or evasion by the Premier from dealing with this matter, from even actually scheduling a meeting with the OPP, who have requested—we know at least by February 9 of this year there was that request. Still, over five weeks later, nothing is happening. These actions by our Premier are maligning and tarnishing the reputation of our democratic institution of this chamber. It's also maligning her office, and causing all members of the public to lose any faith or trust that they once had.

It's time for the Premier to take immediate action, just as we've seen in other every case.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The parliamentary assistant has five minutes.

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I've got five minutes, Speaker? Oh, jeez. Well, I'd love to say that I could speak for five minutes, but it's been repeated time and time again in this House, and I'll repeat it again: The investigation that is

going on with regard to the Sudbury by-election is not an issue that is going to be dealt with in this chamber. We, as a government, stand by that.

The member mentioned taking things seriously, and we do take the matter seriously. The Premier, the House leader and every member on this side who has answered the question has given the same answers over and over again. So I'm going to repeat it. Elections Ontario has determined that the allegations against the Premier and the member for Sudbury are baseless. The Chief Electoral Officer has clearly stated: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges." Mr. Speaker, it's in the hands of authorities to deal with it, and I would say that it rests there.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Leeds–Grenville has given notice of his dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Premier. The member from Leeds–Grenville has five minutes.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thanks very much, Speaker. I can't say that it's a pleasure to be here because I have to express to you, and through you to the parliamentary assistant, my frustration in getting even the most simple of questions answered. I really tried today to provide a very simple question to the Premier. I hope that her parliamentary assistant, who I ask very sincerely this question—today I simply asked, on what date the Premier, her office or her lawyers, was contacted by the Ontario Provincial Police to schedule a meeting regarding this ongoing investigation. I think it's a very simple question, given the fact that in the media—back in February, there were media reports that the Premier and her deputy chief of staff were going to have a meeting with the Ontario Provincial Police. I'm not going to go back to the fact that that week I asked her repeatedly, on a number of occasions—I think four to six times—if she had a meeting scheduled, and she didn't answer the question.

So I was as surprised as anyone to read in the media back in February—this is now five weeks ago—that they were going to have a meeting. I'm even more shocked that the Premier could not meet with the Ontario Provincial Police regarding that ongoing investigation.

It has been stated in this House that the Premier did find a very open schedule when it came to meeting with the Chief Electoral Officer. She opened up her schedule and met with Mr. Essensa, and she's quite open when she talks about that. As we all know, the Chief Electoral Officer doesn't have powers to prosecute but must, as part of the process, refer the matter to the Attorney General's office. I want it again placed on the record that the Premier found lots of time in very short order to meet with the Chief Electoral Officer—but now it has been five weeks and still no direct answer.

Tonight I hope that before the parliamentary assistant runs off to the heritage dinner he'll have a very simple

answer for my question: Can you give me the date the Premier, her office or her lawyers, was contacted for a meeting? Was it five weeks ago? Was it longer than that? Was it five hours ago? We've tried to give the Premier lots of opportunities to clear the record.

I wrote to Vince Hawkes, the commissioner of the OPP, in mid-December when I first saw the Facebook postings from Andrew Olivier in Sudbury. I wrote, as did the third party House leader, Mr. Bisson, the Chief Electoral Officer back in mid-December to ask them to investigate. We all know that the Chief Electoral Officer's report has already been tabled in this Legislature, has already been referred to the Attorney General. The wheels are in motion, yet there is this reluctance to answer the basic questions about when you were contacted.

I, quite frankly, have criticized the Premier in the past for standing up in a press conference and saying things that I felt were interfering in the investigation. To me, not meeting with the OPP is, I think, borderline interfering in this investigation again. She has to be able to take this matter seriously, meet with the Ontario Provincial Police, have her deputy chief of staff do the same and have some sort of participation in a very serious matter. This is a government that is involved in not just one or two but four OPP investigations. These are active investigations, with very serious allegations.

I would think that a Premier who came to this place and who put in her throne speech the fact that she would be different from her predecessor, the fact that she would open with honesty, openness and transparency, to be able to sit here, day after day after day, and not answer questions about participating in an open OPP investigation—it's shameful, Speaker. I'm ashamed that the Premier takes this matter without seriousness. She needs to open up her schedule and have that meeting.

I'm asking, through you, that the parliamentary assistant answer that question: What was the date that she was contacted by the Ontario Provincial Police for a meeting? I want to know that. Ontarians want to know that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Etobicoke North and the parliamentary assistant has five minutes.

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Thank you, Speaker. It's a privilege and honour to share this after-hours time with you officiating, to the Speaker who also doubles as the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Creek.

I will attempt, sir, to address your queries here.

As has been stated, we take this matter very seriously. It has been spoken to repeatedly. The investigation is independent of the government and of this House, as it should be. Elections Ontario, as you've heard, has determined that the allegations against the Premier and the member for Sudbury were baseless, and we will certainly continue to co-operate fully.

I will repeat that the Chief Electoral Officer has clearly stated: "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

I might just conclude by saying that while my honourable opponents are able to issue late show complaints for

non-satisfaction with answers, unfortunately, we are not able to issue the similar late shows for non-satisfaction with the questions.

Good evening.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): Thank you.

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BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Attorney General. The member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton has five minutes.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My primary concern is that the question, again, was quite simple. The Attorney General cancelled an engagement—made an engagement to speak in Sudbury and then, after having committed to that speaking engagement, decided to cancel it. My question was: What did the Attorney General know about the Sudbury scandal and when did she know about it?

The essential question is: When did she find out that there was anything amiss in the Sudbury bribery scandal? Because her knowledge is important. It's important for us to hold the government to account. It's important for us to know who knew what and when. The scandal is something that strikes at the heart of—one of the most important principles of our democratic system is having faith in the administration of justice and having faith in the administration of our province. The fact that a minister would know, could know or might have known something about this incident could be beneficial to the members of this Legislature, but, in addition, to the citizens of the Ontario.

The scandal really strikes at the heart of one of the growing problems in our province: the fact that there is increasing apathy. Year after year we're seeing less and less people coming out to vote. There's a reason for that. People find they don't trust politicians; they don't trust the political system. They feel that their vote doesn't matter. When politicians engage in cynical behaviour, when politicians behave in potentially illegal behaviour, it further fuels that apathy. It's incumbent upon the opposition to hold the government to account and to say, "Listen, that type of behaviour is simply unacceptable."

It's simply unacceptable for a government to believe that they're above the law. The Chief Electoral Officer made a historic finding. It's important to highlight this: It has never been found in the history of Ontario. First of all, an investigation of this type, into the allegations of bribery on the part of the government, has never happened in the history of Ontario. The Chief Electoral Officer wrote that in his report.

In addition, there has never been an apparent contravention of that act that has ever been found by a Chief Electoral Officer. These are historic things that are not good historic things. These are very troubling and very concerning. An apparent contravention—let's make sure

it's very clear—is not a finding of guilt or innocence. The Premier has mentioned that a number of times, and we want to make sure it's clear that we're well aware that it's not a finding of guilt or innocence. But what it is a finding of is an obvious contravention, obvious and glaring. Based on the evidence, it's an obvious and glaring violation of the Election Act—that there's very clear evidence that points to a *prima facie* case for a violation.

Now, of course, a judge will be the final arbiter of guilt or innocence, but the fact that on the face of the evidence, the Chief Electoral Officer was able to say that there is enough evidence here for me to say that this is more than just a fair probability that the Election Act was contravened or violated—that there is more than a fair probability, based on the evidence, that there was a violation on this.

We talked yesterday about the sentence or the potential punishment. This is a serious contravention. If found guilty, there is both a \$25,000 fine as well as two years less a day imprisonment in terms of the punishment that is potential. So these are very serious allegations that carry a very serious punishment.

That's why I asked the question today. The Attorney General did admit that she was going to attend the event in Sudbury. She admitted that she was going to attend and that she cancelled it because she wanted to maintain the appearance of fairness and not actually attend. But that's important to know. Why, then, did she cancel that appearance? What did she think or what did she know at the time, and when did she know that, that gave her the impression that, "Listen, me attending could cause a problem"? That's exactly the question.

The Attorney General mentioned a part of the answer, that she did indeed cancel going and that she did indeed think that there would be a perception problem, an optics problem, if she did attend. Well, then, what did she know and when did she know it? What were the facts or the circumstance around her decision to say, "Listen, I don't want to go there because it might be seen as a problem. As the Attorney General, there's a certain level that I have to hold myself to," which is appropriate.

But what did she know, and when did she know it, that made her decide that she couldn't go to Sudbury—that it was inappropriate for her to go there? What did she know about the bribery scandal? Was she informed and when was she aware of that? Those are the questions that I did not receive answers to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): The member from Scarborough Southwest and parliamentary assistant has five minutes.

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It's a pleasure to respond today to the question posed by the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, but I just can't help saying that we're the last ones in the House today and it was the last of the three questions, so it's like triple overtime—triple overtime in a late show, but I have a response.

I listened carefully to the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton. As the member knows, we're both members of the Law Society of Upper Canada. The gov-

ernment takes this matter very seriously. The Premier and members of the cabinet have spoken repeatedly on this issue.

The investigation is independent of the government and this House. Elections Ontario determined that the allegations against the Premier and the member from Sudbury were baseless. The Chief Electoral Officer clearly stated, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

My fellow colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton would know, as a lawyer, that once it's in the hands of the judges and the prosecutors, legislators stay out of it.

Of course, we will continue to co-operate fully. That's all I have to say tonight.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paul Miller): There being no further matter to debate, I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried. This House stands adjourned until 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 1817.

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of Ontario

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Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario

Première session, 41^e législature



**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Thursday 12 March 2015

Jeudi 12 mars 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 12 March 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 12 mars 2015

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ONTARIO IMMIGRATION ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'IMMIGRATION EN ONTARIO

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 11, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 49, An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / *Projet de loi 49, Loi portant sur l'immigration en Ontario et apportant une modification connexe à la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When this item of business was last debated, we had completed questions and comments on the speech from the member for Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry. We're now into further debate.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: It's my pleasure to rise today as the representative of Windsor West and speak to Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act.

I want to thank all those who spoke before me on this bill, especially our immigration critic. I think she's doing an outstanding job on this portfolio as well as raising the concerns of her constituents from London-Fanshawe.

I'm thankful to have the opportunity to debate this bill today. I know this government has been making a bit of a habit of cutting debate time in this chamber, and I've waited patiently all week, hoping I would have the opportunity to speak to this bill today.

Given recent actions by this government to stifle important debate, I know we all get excited when they allow us the opportunity to speak to important and, in many cases, life-altering legislation in this chamber without cutting off our ability to debate things democratically and passionately in this chamber.

After 10 years without a comprehensive immigration policy for this province, I'm glad we are here debating this bill. Broadly speaking, this bill, as several of my colleagues have indicated, provides the authority for Ontario to establish and govern immigrant selection programs. If passed, the bill would empower the province to set target levels of the number of persons chosen by selection pro-

grams and give consideration to Ontario's labour market needs. It would also allow the minister to pursue regulations that can set up registries for both employers and recruiters interested in participating in Ontario's selection programs under the act.

This, of course, is not an exhaustive list of what the bill hopes to accomplish, but I think that what I've outlined is sufficient, given that my time is limited this morning.

To add some context to this debate, I would like to bring up a few points that were already raised, but I think they are worth bringing up again. Immigration in this province would need to be more than two and a half times greater than it is today in order to offset the decline in Ontario's labour force being caused by our aging population.

Let's unpack this for a minute. Besides the productivity losses that we may face, we need to consider all of the knowledge that will be lost if we don't effectively pass it along to our next generation of workers, which includes Ontario immigrants as well as young people. I'm thinking specifically of auto workers and the tool and die makers that are foundational to the success of Windsor and Essex county. These are craftspeople. They employ skills that cannot be learned overnight and, a lot of the time, require extensive on-the-job training. Utilizing the skills of our current workforce to train those who will take over for them is something we need to think seriously about. If the people that will take over these jobs have not even entered this province yet, we need to get them here and we need to set up on-the-job training programs so that Ontario shares its knowledge with the next generation of workers.

We also need to remember that a number of Ontario immigrants already have the skills they need to be employed in this province. Bill 49 speaks to recruiting and targeting highly trained and employable individuals in Ontario. This initiative is only as good as our ability to recognize their skills.

We've heard this before. It's not new, and the government has been aware of this trend for over a decade. Yet for over 10 years, we have not seen this government come forward and commit to an Ontario immigration plan. I'm glad that finally we are seeing something today.

I think that one thing that is not in this bill—and this issue was touched on by a number of my colleagues—is a focus on immigrants who do not fit into the economic class being discussed in this bill. Furthermore, adequate housing is not addressed in this bill.

All of the concerns I've raised thus far are concerns in my community. Windsor welcomes a large number of

new Ontarians every year. Unfortunately, over the past few years, we've also lost a number of Windsorites to the western provinces. I hope that we can build the economy required to welcome them back one day and reconnect families. Nevertheless, I'm glad to welcome new families to our great city every year.

We have people coming from all over the world to live in our community, and continue to develop the cultural institutions that allow people to enjoy their unique cultural practices and share them with others.

I would like to specifically highlight the excellent work done by the Somali Community of Windsor. This community organization services all residents, but specializes in offering social services targeted to at-risk, marginalized communities in the region, specifically residents originating from Somalia or those of Somali heritage. This is a not-for-profit organization of staff and volunteers that works tirelessly in my community.

Most recently, the Somali Community of Windsor informed me about a project to target Somali youth who have escalating problems of school discipline or are suffering from low self-esteem or delinquency. The program seeks to establish a mechanism for early forms of intervention to help at-risk youth succeed in the community. Programming includes workshop sessions on enhancing social skills and building linkages to provide youth with mentors and support networks.

I've met with this community several times since being elected, and they are motivated, organized and dedicated. I don't think I will ever forget the lessons I'm learning about community activism and engagement from this organization. I really hope this government is taking note of my remarks here, as the Somali Community's program is not yet implemented and is an excellent model to be implemented and duplicated elsewhere. I hope the government looks at these programs when they are designing the criteria of what would qualify for settlement services, and I hope they provide specifics very soon.

I brought up the Somali Community and their work on community programming today because I think it underscores a number of issues yet to be determined in the Ontario Immigration Act. While the goal of bringing more people into Ontario is admirable and needed, we need to look at what support networks we have for these people once they come to our province. We need to assess whether or not those that come here to work have access to affordable housing. We need to look at targeted programming for at-risk youth and how the need for this programming is intensified when we are talking about minority populations.

Rest assured that I can speak until adjournment and beyond about the ambitions and achievements of all of the cultural institutions in my riding and all of the culture we celebrate in Windsor and Essex county. But somehow I don't think you would allow me to do that, Mr. Speaker, even though I know all the members of this chamber would enjoy the discussion. Maybe indulge me one last time by allowing me to highlight one more group, and then I'll bring up the rest at a later date.

0910

I want to highlight the work being done by the Essex County Chinese Canadian Association. Chinese Canadians have a proud tradition in Windsor. I'm sure we all remember that there was a time in Canada when, if you were Chinese, you were not allowed to immigrate to the country. We can all recall the dark chapter of Canadian history that saw the Chinese Immigration Act in effect from 1923 to 1947.

The Essex County Chinese Canadian Association has held events in the past celebrating the repeal of this truly discriminatory legislation. I think that remembering how tragic immigration legislation was in the past helps ground us in how far we've come and how far we have yet to go when legislating immigration policy in Ontario. I thank the Essex County Chinese Canadian Association for reminding us of this.

I think my time is coming to an end, Speaker, and I would like to say that I enjoyed my time speaking to this bill today. While I'm glad to see that we're having a discussion focused on immigration policy for Ontario, I know I am not alone in thinking we should have had some sort of comprehensive immigration plan over a decade ago. Nevertheless, I hope that, moving forward, the government will reflect on my remarks.

First and foremost, I hope they look at the work being done by organizations in my riding that ease the transition for people new to Ontario, remind us of our past and work to build a more inclusive and thriving Ontario. And, Speaker, this bill is incredibly significant to my riding, as Windsor is a border town. In my riding alone there are two border crossings, whether it's through the tunnel into Detroit or across the bridge, and, hopefully, a new publicly owned bridge as well very soon.

More and more, I see that immigrants come across with incredible skills that are not transferable. We need to make sure they have supports in place so that when they come here those skills can be put to work right away and we're able to support their communities.

I mentioned the Somali Community in my speech. They're currently looking to relocate facilities, because they just don't have the funding in place to run their fantastic program. These are things we need to look at when we welcome people into the country and into Ontario, and make sure they have the supports in place specific to their cultural needs. And we need to make sure that the youth they bring with them are supported, so that when they grow up and go through our education system and move on to work, there are jobs out there for them and they have the skills they need in order to succeed.

I think that's just about it for my time, Speaker. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I'm very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act. The intention of this bill is to recognize the long history of immigration within our province. Like many places in our province, my riding of York South-Weston has been

tremendously strengthened by the success of the communities and individuals who have come from other places to call Canada their home.

My community also has a significant presence of the Somali community and of the Filipino community. This bill would address establishing settlement integration programs that are targeted at them, and I think this would be very beneficial to them.

It would also establish, and asks the authority to govern, Ontario's immigration selection programs. I believe that's very important. We have communities such as the Italian community and the Portuguese community that, like my family, came much earlier compared to the Somali community and nowadays can't even come here. There's just no way that they're accepted. Even if they would make the selection, we're just not taking in people from countries that belong to communities that in a way helped to build Canada and helped to build cities like Toronto and the province of Ontario. Sometimes it's sad to think of it that way.

I think we do need to shake up the system. I know that every one of us who comes from another place in the world could tell a quite interesting immigration story about their family; there's no time. It's time, instead, to bring this bill forward and to get it to committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: Thanks very much, Speaker. Good morning to you. It's nice to see you in the chair. I'm pleased to provide two minutes of questions and comments on the fine speech by the member for Windsor West. Her community, like mine in Leeds–Grenville, is a border community. We have two international bridges in our riding. Some of the issues that the member put on the table today are similar to issues that we have in our riding.

I would like to thank the government for bringing forward this motion to debate this bill this morning. I have to tell you that we're excited to join in the debate. Nine of our members have spoken to this bill so far, so we still have 19 members of our caucus who are eager and anxious to speak. In fact, other than Ms. Jones and I, every one of the members here in the chamber in our caucus has yet to speak to the bill. We're all ready and excited to put our comments from our ridings.

I'd just like to say that one of the events that I enjoy in my riding—and it has been going on for over 30 years—is the annual multicultural festival. I can't get over it; every year that I go there I meet new Canadians who have just come to Brockville, who have joined our community and who take great pride in attending that festival and showing the men and women in the city and in the riding as a whole their culture. This is a great event where you've got food and music. But most importantly, this group, this multicultural council, has worked for over three decades to help educate the community. I think they've done just a tremendous job. I know that they're very supportive, as our caucus is, of this legislation. We look forward to further debate this morning. Our Con-

servative caucus is eager and anxious to join in the debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to you. I welcome the discussion on Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act. It's something that I've been actually bringing forward to certain ministers and ministries for the last couple of years.

Northern Ontario, as you know, was devastated by the downturn in the forest industry. Things are turning around. The mining industry is starting to pick up. There is such a need and an opportunity for employment, particularly in the northern part of my riding. We are looking for workers. Anybody who is looking to relocate to that area has an opportunity to come to beautiful communities such as White River, Chapleau and Wawa, which are looking to secure individuals to come to their area.

Having the discussion in regard to setting target levels based on the labour market needs—we've been crying and yelling about that for a very long time. Also, to conduct research, organize educational and training programs and have a registry list where both employers and recruiters can actually submit their names—we welcome that opportunity, and it's long overdue that we should be having this discussion. But—I need to say “but”—a lot of the discussion is failing in that we need to make sure that our federal cousins are on board with this as well. Without them, it's going to be difficult to move this forward.

On behalf of the vast communities that are across my riding, particularly in the northern boundaries of my riding, I welcome the opportunity to have the discussion. I will be listening very closely to the discussion and will be relaying this because I do know there are some individuals who will love to come and provide some comments and their views as to what they need, when they need it, the specialties that they need and how quickly they need it.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning. It is my pleasure to speak on Bill 49. I had the privilege during the last session to work on Bill 161, which is similar legislation. Unfortunately, an election got in the way, but here we are today debating this bill. It's such an important bill because it really captures the spirit of who we are as Ontarians.

0920

You know, over the last few hundred years in this province, we've been able to build a province like Ontario because of our immigration. I always say that outside of our aboriginal population every single person in this province has an immigrant past. My father is from Grenada. I was born in England; my mother is from England. We all have an immigrant past, and we need to continue to work on immigration to strengthen the way in which our immigration policies work federally to allow us to meet some of our needs here in the province of Ontario.

We know that over the next 10 years there will be 2.5 million job openings here in the province of Ontario. We do have a low birthrate and an aging population. It is important for us to continue to attract the best and the brightest from around the world so we can continue to build the type of province that we've been so fortunate to have over the many years.

I know the member from Windsor West talked about programs that we have and making sure we have the right type of programs. I'm so proud that our government has invested almost \$1 billion since 2003 into our settlement and retraining programs that work with new Canadians, our bridge training programs and our French- and English-as-a-second-language program, which we have 100,000 people currently in. Our bridge training programs are quite interesting because 50,000 people have successfully accelerated their foreign training credentials so they can work here in the province of Ontario. That's something I think we have gotten right in this province. I would say that Ontario—when it comes to our settlement services, we are the best in this country.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Windsor West, you have two minutes.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Thank you, Speaker. I'd like to thank the members from York South–Weston, Leeds–Grenville, my colleague from Algoma–Manitoulin and the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

In my community, because we are a border town, we have a high population of immigrants come in and out of Windsor. Some choose to stay in Windsor; some use it as a portal to move on to somewhere else in Ontario. Although the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport boasted of the investments in programs for immigrants, I will say that from what I'm hearing from my community, there is still a large gap that needs to be addressed, a large gap when it comes to training or being able to transfer their skills.

I can share a story—it seems like another lifetime ago. I was a dental assistant in an office in downtown Windsor, right in the heart of Windsor. We had two people that would come in to clean the office. We got talking about where they were from, how long they've been in Canada and why they chose Windsor to live in. I eventually asked what it was that they did back in the country that they had come from. It was interesting and kind of disheartening to find out that the lady who was cleaning our dental office is actually a trained and licensed dentist back in her own country where she came from. She chose to come to Canada, chose Ontario as her home and chose to stay in Windsor and yet her skills were not transferable. There was a great barrier for her to go back to school and get the credentials she needed in order to be able to practise here.

So I think there's still a lot of work to be done. This is a great step forward. I mentioned Somali Community. Again, the minister had mentioned all the money they've thrown into the system and the wonderful things they're doing, but we still have immigrants who are coming here who have to fund their own programs for their youth.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. Good morning to you, sir. It's good to see you in the chair this morning. I am pleased to stand and add my comments on Bill 49.

It's interesting, and I'm sure you've heard these comments before, that we're all products of immigrants, in this country, who came to this country for a better life. My own ancestors came here about 200 years ago, back in the 1820s. There were about six of them who came over at one time. We've certainly done the historical—we've looked back in history to see who we're related to and what branch of the trees and whatever else. We've done a pretty good job of it. As they came and settled in the Ottawa area—actually, they settled in North Gower, which is a small community in the Ottawa area. That's where they settled, and they branched out from there.

My great-grandfather, I believe, ended up in Essex county, which was where I was born and raised. But they ended up going across to the United States and certainly across Canada.

I could just imagine, Speaker, when they got off the boat. I can just imagine that. They got off the boat; we don't know exactly where they got off. We believe it was somewhere around Montreal. But coming from Ireland, which was quite a different country, I suppose, than what Canada was back in the 1820s, I can just imagine what they were anticipating. I don't know what they were thinking of. I'm sure they were hoping for a better life and an opportunity to raise their families and continue on in this country, which they did. It was about the third generation of those original settlers that started to move across Canada and the United States and settle other regions of the province.

It's interesting, as you look back in history or look back in your own history at some events that happened back then that can be related to what I'm doing right now. If you go to Manotick, in Ottawa, you'll find a street that's named after us, and it was named for those first settlers who came to that area. There's also a road north of Rivers, Manitoba, that has our name on it. In fact, there used to be a town out there called Pettapiece at one point.

The individuals involved in how these things were named, if you read the history, had a lot to do with municipal politics, and they were quite well respected where they lived.

I'm going to fast-forward to now. There's a chap I met in Stratford. His name is Gezahn Wordofa. He's got quite an interesting history. He's worked for the United Nations, and he actually came here from Russia. He spent about eight or nine years in Russia. He met his wife, a Canadian girl, in Russia and came to Canada.

He started the Multicultural Association of Perth–Huron. It's one thing to get immigrants to come to this country—and a lot of them want to come here because they know that Canada is the land of opportunity, although Ontario is certainly having its issues right now

and we lose a lot of these immigrants, who go to the west because of job opportunities.

Gezahgn has started what they call the Multicultural Association of Perth-Huron. He got me involved. He's invited me to a couple of meetings, a couple of different functions they've had. One of the issues that immigrant people have in Canada, especially in rural areas, is a sense of inclusion in the community. If there are only one or two families of a certain group that come over, they sometimes have problems meeting their neighbours, for example, and things like that, and finding jobs and feeling comfortable in their situation.

So what Gezahgn has done is started this multicultural association. I was at a celebration they had last fall. There are about 250 members in this association right now. It's not just one group from one country; it's countries from all over the world that are involved. I didn't realize there were that many countries represented in Perth-Wellington because they tend to keep to themselves. They aren't in the communities as much as we would like them to be. This is not their fault, certainly; it's just a matter of getting to know who is around you and getting comfortable with who you're with.

So he started this association. What he does is, if you've been here for a while and you're having difficulty, say, finding a job, getting your records in order or whatever else, then he and his organization will help you out with these types of things, if you request it. It has grown so much that, actually, this organization is sponsored by the United Way and they've taken them under their wing to help them with the organizational part of it and also to get the word out as to what they are doing.

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We welcome these people into our communities. We're in an enviable position, I think, in Perth-Wellington, where our jobless rate is very low. We're probably under 4% in our unemployment rate. We are looking for people to fill jobs. In fact, some of the communities in the riding actually go into the larger cities and bus people into some of the places in Perth-Wellington to work for the day and then bus them home, which is quite unusual. But we have an underemployment problem where we are. We welcome these people or anybody who wants to come out into the rural areas because of this unemployment situation that we have.

Anyway, the multicultural association does exactly that. They will find these people work that they may be interested in. Unfortunately, some of them come here with an education that might not fit the bill; however, they want to work.

I was told by a Chinese girl at one of these occasions that her father has a degree in agriculture from China and cannot find the employment here that he's after. I think there's probably an issue with the language—that's probably one problem, but he's still continuing on. There are jobs for these people so at least they can get settled in Ontario and in our riding.

We are actively seeking people to come out to our riding because there are job opportunities out there. This

multicultural association helps people navigate the system. When we see that the province is trying to encourage this, we would ask that they not only encourage them to come to the cities but encourage them to come to rural Ontario, where I think these people can fit into our way of life and certainly be able to progress and have a good life.

Also, I would like to advise you, Speaker, that our housing costs are probably not as high as in some of the major cities. We do have housing in Perth-Wellington that would probably be affordable to anybody moving to this country as long as they wanted to work hard, and for most people who come to this country that's exactly what they want to do: work hard and raise their families with a decent income and certainly the security that this country offers.

Anyway, that's a little bit about the Huron-Perth multicultural association, which I will be working with on a number of things in the riding just because it's something that really interests me. Also, Mr. Wordofa, who is running this organization, likes to keep in contact with members of the Legislature, both federally and provincially, just to see if there are any programs coming down the pipeline that might help his organization. Certainly we do that; if he needs some help with something or any of the people involved in that, our phone lines are always open. We try to do as much as we can to make these people more comfortable and welcome in our community.

That's a little bit about what's going on in Perth-Wellington, and I welcome a bill that does encourage immigration. I thank you for your time, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Again, it's a privilege and a pleasure to rise and speak on behalf of the good people of Algoma-Manitoulin. I listened very closely to the comments that the member from Perth-Wellington brought forward.

Again, I wanted to touch on the impact of this, which I see as a discussion that we're going to be having in regard to how Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act, can actually identify particular labour market needs and how we could actually capitalize on those particular areas across this province.

Once again I'm going to toot my horn: Algoma-Manitoulin is in need of individuals who would fall under such of these discussions that we're looking at having, particularly conducted researches. There has been lots of research that has been done across the Algoma-Manitoulin area, particularly in the northern part, where AWIC has been working tirelessly in order to identify the shortages that they have in regard to support jobs, industry jobs and service jobs. These are the individuals and the skilled people that we need in that area. I've been asking the minister—I think we've been talking about this for a year or two since I've been up here, particularly in regard to my northern region—about why we need this discussion and why this is so important to securing that labour workforce to come up to northern Ontario.

There are a lot of parts of this province that are really struggling, but we are struggling even more greatly because it is so easy for an individual to leave those communities, because of the downturn in the forestry and mining sectors, that our skilled labour workforce has moved on. The others who were there in support positions are now into those skilled positions. We need a new, fresh influx of individuals to come to northern Ontario. This is something that I'm going to be working very closely with, along with many across Algoma-Manitoulin.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Michael Chan: There's an urgency to pass this bill and to move it to committee. Bill 49 allows us to act on recommendations made by the Auditor General—I know that some members opposite mentioned the Auditor General's report a number of times.

As well, Bill 49 will position us to take full advantage of express entry, a new system introduced by the federal government this year, on January 1. In Ontario, we will be rolling out express entry in upcoming weeks.

Again, there's an urgency to hopefully pass the bill. I think the opposition party debate Bill 49 by continuing to put up speakers. I want to let you know, Speaker, that the bill has been debated for 10 hours now and that over 70 members of the Legislature have either spoken to this bill or participated in the debate during questions and comments. The government extended debate beyond the 6.5-hour threshold so some members could have an opportunity to speak to the bill. Listening, it has been clear that the majority of the members are in support of this bill. So it's really time to stop the debate and send it to committee when possible.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I was listening intently when my colleague from Perth-Wellington was speaking about the Ottawa area. I find it a little odd that the city of Perth doesn't seem to be in the riding of Perth-Wellington. I know Perth very well because I went to summer camp there and my kids go to summer camp there.

Perth is such an interesting community. I invite everybody to go visit it. It was settled by Scottish immigrants who were working on building the Rideau Canal. They have some really incredible historic buildings and bridges to go see there. You really get that feeling in that community of the Scottish immigrants—that they came here to work on the canal and weren't planning necessarily to stay but they decided to stay. Why did they decide to stay? Well, they had work, but that wasn't the only reason they decided to stay. They decided to stay because they felt comfortable in the area because they had a sense of community and because they had supports within that community.

I think that what this bill does address is part of what is needed to attract skilled immigrants, the best and the brightest, as the minister just said recently. We want to attract people, and we want them to be comfortable. We want them to be happy. We want them to be integrated and to stay and invest in our communities.

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We have to look at how we can go about that, and I think what we need to do is consult with those community groups. They're not necessarily asking for money, but they are asking to have a say in how best to welcome members of their communities to Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm glad to add a few minutes of debate to Bill 49, specifically one part of the bill that's called "Other Amendments" under the Regulated Health Professions Act. I can support the parts of the act that are there. They want to make the process more timely and they want to make the process more accessible through having to pay a fee to get information. But all of this is for naught if they cannot get training spots.

I'd like to give an example from my riding. We have this pediatrician who comes from Brazil. She married a Canadian who lives in my riding, who lives in Nickel Belt and works at the mine. She knew as she was finishing her training that she needed to get some Canadian experience, so she did part of her training in Alberta. She is a phenomenal pediatrician with skills that are needed all over. Sick Kids here in Toronto is quite willing to give her a job so that she can get her licence, but she lives in Nickel Belt. Her husband is in Nickel Belt. Her family is in Nickel Belt.

Why is it that people in the health professions in the Regulated Health Professions Act who want to continue their training cannot have those opportunities throughout Ontario? New immigrants to our province don't only want to be in Toronto—nothing against Toronto; a lot of them come and settle here. But more and more of them would like to be able to settle in the north. We certainly want the skills that they are bringing to the north, but if they are not able to complete the required training so that they are allowed to practise, then all is for naught. This family is going to move to Toronto, and Nickel Belt and Sudbury will continue to be underserved. This has to change.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Perth-Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I listened intently to the comments from the member from Algoma-Manitoulin, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade, the member from Thornhill and the member from Nickel Belt.

Especially when I listened to the member from Nickel Belt, she expressed some of the same issues that I raised in my comments about being underserved and people not coming to the rural areas, and there is work available. I think that's something that needs to be promoted by governments, that work is not just in the cities and not just in the GTA, although it's certainly here too.

When we get into situations where we have an under-employment problem in Perth-Wellington—like I say, we have people who are being bused in to work in some of our factories from the large centres—that should throw up a red flag, but it should also point to an opportunity

that we have. We can encourage people to move into some of the areas outside of the GTA and the London-Windsor corridor because there are good jobs and there are jobs available. We must encourage not only people who are new to this country; we must encourage people who are already here.

Again, I get back to the Huron-Perth multicultural association. This is what they do. They try to encourage people to come out. They try to make it easier for them to settle in Huron and Perth counties, because there are opportunities out in those areas.

I am sure anyone who has been to Perth-Wellington and has been to the theatre in Stratford would know that we are a multicultural society there and we have many opportunities that we believe new immigrants would cherish in Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I'd like to make a couple of points on this morning's debate on this legislation. As we said earlier in this debate, I think most Ontarians and pretty well everybody in this Legislature is in agreement that Ontario has to play a larger role when it comes to immigration policy in Ontario. If you take a look at the history of Canada, there are a number of provinces like Quebec that play a much larger role when it comes to dealing with the policies and dealing with the various issues having to do with how people immigrate and where they immigrate to. Certainly Ontario, being the province that traditionally gets the greater number of immigrants than any other province in Canada, should have a role, because we're in great need of people to immigrate to different parts of the province. I'll speak to that a little bit later.

I just want to pick up on the honourable minister across the way—minister for something, and I can't remember the riding, I'm sorry—who got up and said, "Oh, my God, we've been debating this bill now for 10 hours, and it's so important that we pass this bill." I think he used a word like "imperative" or "urgency." It was going to be like the end of the world.

I was sitting back here thinking, "Was it, what, about eight years ago, 10 years ago that the current Liberal government said it was going to do something to deal with foreign-trained doctors, foreign-trained electricians, foreign-trained engineers, foreign-trained all kinds of people that have been trained in Europe and different parts of the world who immigrate to Ontario and Canada and who can't get a job because their qualifications are not recognized here in Ontario?" If I'm an electrician or I'm a doctor or I'm an engineer from Europe or somewhere else in the world who has been trained, I still have the same problems that I had back in 2007, when the government said they were going to do something. There have been some small steps made, but by and large there has not been the type of change that the government promised would happen when it comes to allowing those people trained in foreign universities and colleges that provide qualifications comparable to Ontario's to be dealt with.

I still see people in this city on a daily basis—a lot of them driving taxis, and I'm a good booster of the taxi industry, using taxis almost every day—where I run across them and I say to them, "So what do you do?" They say, "Well, I'm an electrical engineer." "Oh, and you've not been able to get work?" "No, I can't get my qualifications recognized here in Ontario."

Since 2007, this government was supposed to do something, and we're now being told in this debate today: This bill has to be passed like yesterday so that we can deal with the issues that Ontario needs to deal with when it comes to immigration policy in the province. I'd like to believe the government, I truly would, and I think there's not a member in this House on either side of the aisle who would not want to believe that in fact passing this legislation three days ago, or this minute or two minutes from now is going to have an immediate change when it comes to immigration policy in this province. I just don't have confidence, quite frankly, in the government's ability to deliver, because far too often the government has come to this House—and this is not a prop; it's our order paper—and brought legislation forward that has a great title, that is accompanied by some of the best press releases I've ever seen written, that gives the citizens a sense that something is happening, but in fact, other than the title and the press release, minimal baby steps are being made to address the issue.

We just saw that with the passage of Bill 40, the Agriculture Insurance Act, yesterday. It's a great idea. Everybody in the House voted for it. We think that expanding the whole idea of crop—what's the word I'm looking for?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Business risk management.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Risk management, thank you.

Expanding risk management is a great idea, but without money being tied to it, it means to say potentially that there will be more people needing to be insured with the same amount of money, which means to say it's a reduction. Yet the government says—great title, great press release, moving with Godspeed to do all kind of things. But we're actually possibly taking a step back.

So I want to believe the minister when he stands in this House and says there is such an urgency to pass this bill. I'm not filibustering; New Democrats are not filibustering this bill. I just want to put this on the record.

There are some legitimate concerns being raised by members of this House. We just heard from our member from Nickel Belt, who raised issues in regard to doctors in her community who can't stay because they aren't able to get their credentials recognized when it comes to the work that they do within the health field. I look at the case that I have in northeastern Ontario, as my good friend from Algoma-Manitoulin does, where we represent large industrial sectors such as mining, forestry and hydro development, and we have people who are trying to get work who are qualified and can't get jobs because their credentials are not recognized.

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Those people who live in Ontario who do these kinds of jobs are already working, so it's not as if we're dis-

placing people who want the job. The people who are able to do the job are working, but there's a whole bunch of people still needed above and beyond that, and we can't recognize their qualifications.

If I thought for one second that the minister was right, that, my God, if we pass this today, tomorrow our problem will at least start to be dealt with, I would have some confidence. But given the track record of this government, I have very little confidence that the government is actually going to move with any kind of speed on this.

Is this a step in the right direction? Absolutely. Is this something that is long overdue? Darn right it is. But I think the government should maybe take some of their own rhetoric a little bit more seriously and actually try to do something so that we're able to deal with the issue that has been plaguing us for so long, which is the ability for people trained outside of Ontario, in countries across the world that have education systems, qualifications and regulations that are comparable to Ontario, to be recognized much quicker than they are now.

Je veux aussi prendre l'occasion de parler de l'immigration francophone dans cette province. La province de l'Ontario et le gouvernement fédéral, dans ce cas-ci, dans mon opinion, ne font pas un très bon job quand ça vient à dire qu'il y a d'autres opportunités pour les immigrés francophones de s'établir dans la province, autrement que dans les villes de Toronto et Ottawa.

Ottawa est une très belle ville; mon frère reste là. La ville de Toronto—une très belle ville; il n'y a rien de mal avec elle. Mais il y a beaucoup d'autres places en Ontario où on est majoritairement francophones, où il y a l'opportunité pour des emplois qui sont très bien payés et où il y a un style de vie que moi, je dirais, est au-dessus de ceux d'Ottawa et de Toronto.

Je regarde la ville de Hearst. Je regarde la ville de Kapuskasing, la ville de Timmins et beaucoup d'autres communautés à travers le nord-est de l'Ontario, des communautés qui sont vives, qui ont des économies assez fortes, qui ont des emplois disponibles. On a besoin d'être capable de renforcer la communauté francophone dans ces places-là, parce que, comme on le sait, la réalité est que tous les citoyens de cette province, francophones ou anglophones, ont moins d'enfants aujourd'hui qu'ils en avaient dans les générations passées.

Moi, je pense à père et mère Lehoux sur le bord de ma mère; eux autres, ils ont eu neuf enfants. Sur le bord de mon père, mère et père Bisson ont eu 10 enfants. Si on regarde notre famille, les Bisson de ma génération, on est trois. Et là, moi, j'en ai eu deux et nos filles en ont eu deux. On a moins d'enfants aujourd'hui qu'on en avait dans le passé, et quoi qu'il arrive, ça fait une pression sur la communauté francophone où ça a un effet de réduire le nombre total.

Donc, oui, il y a un besoin, avec les politiques d'immigration dans cette province, de regarder comment on peut encourager les francophones qui viennent d'outre-mer de venir et de choisir des places comme Timmins, Hearst, Windsor, Sudbury ou d'autres communautés—Welland, par exemple, où il y a beaucoup

de francophones—où tu peux vivre en français et de trouver ta place dans cette province.

Donc, je dis, ce projet de loi, je n'ai pas grande confiance que ça va changer cette affaire-là à la vitesse que, moi, je serais satisfait avec. Mais je veux dire au gouvernement, si on regarde les expériences que le gouvernement a eues quand ça vient à reconnaître les qualifications d'outre-mer à travers les différents secteurs comme la santé, les métiers et autres, on se trouve, depuis 2007, à avoir fait des pas très minimes quand ça vient à être capable d'accepter ces qualifications d'outre-mer quand elles sont comparables à celles de l'Ontario.

Il est quasiment encore bien proche d'impossible pour ce monde-là de se qualifier. Donc, ils s'établissent où? Ils s'établissent ici à Toronto et ils s'établissent à Ottawa en attendant une bonne journée où ils vont être capables de travailler dans le métier ou la profession de leur choix.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister talking about the urgency of this bill and how important it is to be passed. I have no doubt that the government is going to try to invoke closure on this bill when they call the question in the next rotation. But let's not kid ourselves. The government, since 2007, has said, "We're going to do something to deal with foreign credentials." Since 2007, very few steps have been taken to deal with this issue. If anybody believes that the government is going to move at breakneck speed on immigration law for Ontario that deals with issues like foreign qualifications and where people are able to go and establish themselves once they immigrate, you've got another think coming.

This is a great title, tied to a great press release, but I think it'll have little in the way of action.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to speak this morning to Bill 49, the Ontario Immigration Act.

I think it's worthwhile to note the history of this bill. This bill was originally tabled prior to the 2014 election. There was, in fact, extensive debate on this bill back in the winter of 2014. Of course, then, an election intervened and it died on the order paper.

We've reintroduced the bill, and just since we've reintroduced this bill and started debate all over again—the bill has now been debated for 11 hours; over 72 members of the Legislature have already spoken to this bill, either with their speaking turn or in questions and comments, and we're well past the six-and-a-half-hour threshold.

Everybody seems to be pretty supportive of the bill, and, quite frankly, I think some of the members are getting bored with debating the bill. I couldn't help but notice that when the member from Nickel Belt spoke to the bill a few minutes ago, she totally devoted her remarks to the health practitioners act, which didn't seem to be terribly connected to the Ontario Immigration Act. So I would suggest—

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Come on, you should know better than that.

Hon. Liz Sandals: That's not in the act. I think, Speaker, they're proving my point. They were speaking to a different act. They admit it.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order. Order, please. Would the member from Timmins–James Bay come to order. The member from Leeds–Grenville, come to order.

Hon. Liz Sandals: So I think that what we really need to do is get on with looking at this act, which will formally recognize Ontario's role and give Ontario a much more active role in choosing immigrants to come to Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

M^{me} Gila Martow: J'ai entendu ce que le membre de Timmins–James Bay a dit au sujet de l'immigration. C'est vrai qu'on a une communauté francophone en Ontario très forte qui veut être un membre dans la discussion sur cette nouvelle loi sur l'immigration parce qu'on veut donner la chance aux immigrants des pays francophones autour du monde de venir au Canada et de choisir le Canada et l'Ontario pour être leur nouveau milieu d'emploi et d'éducation, pour y travailler et y jouer. J'espère qu'on peut avoir cette discussion avec toutes les communautés francophones en Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, we have a very large francophone community, as the member from Timmins–James Bay just said, that wants to welcome francophone immigration from across the world from francophone countries—and to choose Ontario. I think that the added bonus of targeting some francophone immigrants to Ontario isn't just for the obvious nature of making our francophone community strong. It's because many of these francophone communities are away from the urban centres, and that's kind of our target: to try to draw immigrants to Ontario but not necessarily to the large crowded urban centres like Toronto and Ottawa. Since many of these francophone communities are spread out across the province, by targeting francophones, perhaps we can attract people to those other communities.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I sort of take offence to the comments that were made by the Minister of Education. I am talking to the bill. I do my homework, Speaker. I read my bills before I come here—and I will read for her part VII of the bill that is called, "Other Amendments." The Regulated Health Professions Act, under subsection 38(1): "Subsection 43(1) of the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991"—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The Minister of Education has got to go back to school.

M^{me} France Gélinas: —"is amended by adding the following clauses:

"(h.0.1) requiring that decisions made under subsections 15 ... of the code be made within a reasonable time;"—I commented that I support this part of the bill.

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I'll continue to read: "(h.0.2) requiring that notices required under subsections 15 ... of the code and written reasons required under subsection 20(1) of the code be provided within a reasonable time;"—I said that I also supported that part of the bill.

Then I went on to talk about section 16 of the bill, that is amended as follows, and I will continue to read from the bill: "(3) The registrar shall establish a process for the purposes of dealing with an applicant's request under subsection (1)." They're allowed to charge a fee.

This is where I started to say that all of this is all good, but if on the ground they cannot get training in Nickel Belt, if on the ground they have to stay in Toronto in order to get their credentials recognized, then all of this is for nothing.

I think the Minister of Education owes me a bit of an apology. I stayed within the bill. I had read the bill; I supported part of the bill. I thought I was being a pretty fair person here, where I supported the bill and I put it on the record. Where I thought the bill needed some improvement, I stood up and said that for my constituents, this needs to be changed. Otherwise, we will still continue to have problems of access to physicians in Nickel Belt.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Questions and comments—

Hon. Liz Sandals: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order: the Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I would like to apologize to the member from Nickel Belt.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order: the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I would also like to apologize to the minister, because I was hot under the collar when she made her comment.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Are you going to apologize or not?

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I recognize the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much. I'm not going to apologize, because I'm a bit disappointed with the third party and their expression that this bill has really no teeth and it's just a press release. I believe the member from Timmins–James Bay said that it's just about a hollow bill that goes out to a press release. I think this piece of legislation is so important for the province of Ontario.

The third party and the official opposition continue to delay great pieces of legislation that are so needed in this province right now, especially considering that the federal government has changed its immigration framework in Ontario and the country, and the express entry model is in play. We need to make sure that we can comply with that piece of legislation and actually benefit from it.

In the last session, prior to the NDP calling an election, technically, through not supporting our budget, we had seven hours of debate with Bill 161. Today, we have 11 hours of debate in this Legislature on this bill.

This is an important piece of legislation. Setting targets—5% of the immigration in the province of Ontario, and our target will be to attract francophones so we can support our small francophone communities in large cities, so we can continue to build a strong francophone presence here in the province of Ontario. These two parties are delaying this legislation.

We set targets to ensure that we can have control of our immigration process here in the province of Ontario and that we can get ahead of other provinces, to continue to attract the best and brightest from around the world. But it's the opposition and the third party that continue to delay this bill—almost 20 hours of debate in this Legislature, and they are not supporting it to this point.

We need their support. We need to move on. I hope that we can continue to build the type of province—

Mr. Steve Clark: Speaker, a point of order.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Point of order: the member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: The minister is incorrect. This bill has not had 20 hours of debate.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Carry on, Minister. You have seven seconds.

Hon. Michael Coteau: Thank you, Speaker. So, 11 in this session, and seven from the previous session on Bill 161: You do the math; it's close to 20.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Are we ready to proceed?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, I'll go, with questions and comments—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Okay, I'll get to you. I just want to make sure they're going to be quiet. I recognize the member from Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Imagine that: There are people around the world who are dying to give their people the right to vote, the right to expression of ideas and a right to oppose governments when they think right; and we're being told, because this bill is 10 hours into debate, that somehow or other, the loyal opposition of Her Majesty's government is thwarting democracy in some way and the third party is doing the same.

The reality is that neither the Conservatives or New Democrats are filibustering this bill. The reality is that we are putting on the record some of our concerns.

My concern is that, when I look at the government and what they've done over the last 14 years, they never brought this bill forward until the last Parliament. Now we have a whole bunch of new members who were elected who were not party to the last debate, who have the right to both debate and to hear debate in this Legislature. For the government to say, "Oh, well, it had debate in the previous Parliament, so, therefore, we don't need a debate now," I think is really an affront to those members

who were elected in the last general election, who were not here for the previous debate.

I, for one, will always stand on the side of caution when it comes to trying to truncate debate or trying to, in some way, say that somebody who expresses their view, either by way of the media or by way of protest in this province or by way of words in this House, is somehow an affront to the government's authority to do what it has to do.

The British parliamentary system invented this system, and it's quite wise. The government gets to propose, the opposition and other government members get a chance to give opinion to that proposal, and at the end of the day, the government always gets its way, even in a minority Parliament.

I just say to you: Be careful what you say in this place, because people do take their jobs seriously. If we want to put our thoughts on the record, we have the right to do so. People died to give me this right, and I will not give it up.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for recognizing me to speak on a very important bill. I do want to pick up on where the member from Timmins–James Bay left off, because I'm one of those people who had the great privilege of coming to this great country and this incredible province when I was 15 years old, about 26 years ago, because my parents did flee an oppressive regime. Many of you may know that my father spent nine months as a political prisoner. We were very fortunate to come into a free society, a free country like ours, where a kid like myself could get elected in the Legislature and stand here and debate—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And be the government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: —and become the government House leader, indeed. We are very lucky and privileged to have that, because immigration has been, and will continue to be, such an incredible source of economic prosperity and vitality for our country and for our province. Thanks to the First Nations of this country and this province, many have come in successive drives from different parts of the world to this great land and have built lives. We need to make sure that we continue to do so.

This bill very much is about that shared responsibility that we have the privilege of in making sure that we continue to play that role. That is especially true when a province like Ontario is the number one destination for newcomers. People line up around the world to come to Ontario and to build their lives in this province.

I'm very privileged to have some incredible settlement agencies in my riding of Ottawa Centre, organizations like the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization, known as OCISO; the Catholic Centre for Immigrants; and Immigrant Women Services Ottawa. All of these organizations—and there are many more, Speaker—do a lot of incredible work in my community of Ottawa Centre in providing supports, jobs training and

settlement services so that newcomers, the immigrants, can build their lives in my hometown of Ottawa and be full members of our society.

But we need to continue to do more to make sure that we have a vibrant immigration system in our province. That's why this bill, Bill 49, is so important.

Our government believes that a strong partnership between the federal government and the province is essential to the successful integration of newcomers into our communities and our workforce. That's why we have moved forward with Bill 49, and that is to strengthen the province's role in immigrant selection.

Ontario needs to be well positioned so it can take full advantage of the express entry immigration model that the federal government introduced this year, in 2015. The new express entry system will oversee applications for permanent residents under several economic immigration programs. In simple terms, potential candidates will fill out an online profile, and the highest-ranking candidates will be invited to apply for permanent residence.

Ontario very much looks forward to working with the new express entry system when it is fully operational later this year. I think a lot of us can testify that we hear on a regular basis from people who have applied for immigration about how long that process takes and the uncertainty that comes with it, and this will help.

We need to move forward with this bill to be well positioned to take full advantage of this new immigration model. We welcome the opportunity through express entry to grow the number of nominees and position Ontario as a full partner on immigration with the federal government.

Speaker, we need to move forward with this bill and send it to committee. As you know, we introduced this important piece of legislation in November 2014. The bill was introduced and debated in the previous Parliament as well, where it was referred to as Bill 161, and it was debated for over seven hours then. We allowed the debate to continue when we reached six and a half hours of debate in this Parliament so that more members would have an opportunity to present their views on this bill that all members support. Further, speakers from the government side shared their 20-minute speaking segments among three or four members.

This bill, thus far, has seen 11 hours of debate in this Parliament and seven hours, as I mentioned earlier, in the previous Parliament. According to my count, there are about 73 members who have either spoken to this bill or participated in the debate during questions and comments. I really believe that there has been considerable debate on this bill and that we have heard a wide range of viewpoints, opinions and perspectives. It is time that this bill is put to a vote for second reading and hopefully referred to committee, where the real work takes place.

Speaker, therefore, I move that this question be now put.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock. Point of order, member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: I've got members here—Mr. Arnot, Ms. Scott and Ms. Martow—all wanting to speak to this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Mr. Steve Clark: The question should not be put.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): That's not a point of order.

Mr. Naqvi moves that the question now be put. Taking into consideration the length of time this bill has been debated, the number of speakers and the historical range under which the question of closure has been allowed by previous Speakers, I will allow the question to be put.

Mr. Naqvi has moved that the question now be put. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

This vote will be taken during deferred votes after question period.

Vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): This House stands recessed until 10:30 a.m.

The House recessed from 1013 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I'd like to introduce somebody very special from Oakville today, and that's Sydney Clark. A few short years ago, SickKids hospital saved Sydney's life, and as a result of that, she decided she would make a career. Sydney Clark is here today from the SickKids Foundation.

Mr. Bob Delaney: On behalf of the member for Eglinton–Lawrence and certainly page Arlyne James, I'm pleased today to introduce her mother, Sheliagh Flynn James; her father, George James; her sister, Keelin James; and her brother, Conall James. They will be in the members' gallery this morning. Would members please welcome them.

Hon. Tracy MacCharles: I would like to welcome Tina Afridi and Reza Rizvi from my riding of Pickering–Scarborough East to the Legislature this morning. They are seated in the members' east gallery. They're the parents of page Ali Rizvi, and we're having lunch together in the dining room today. Welcome.

Hon. Michael Chan: Speaker, today is the last day at Queen's Park for our pages. I want to thank them for their hard work and wish them all the best in the future.

Today, the wonderful page from my riding, Victoria Soltan, is page captain. This is the second time she is the captain, so I'm promoting her to page general.

I would also like to welcome Victoria's family to the House: parents Tony and Karen, sister Melanie, and grandmother Gloria Richards. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I know we're going to debate this, but I cannot resist. I need to acknowledge someone who's here today, a former mem-

ber of this House and my former member, Mr. Phil McNeely, in the gallery today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions that won't step on the Speaker's duties?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: It is my privilege to welcome and introduce the family and loved ones of Adam Brunt, a firefighter hopeful who passed in February—Al Brunt, Christy Brunt, Ashlee Brunt and Dr. Jenna McNamee—and also to welcome the family of Gary Kendall, who passed five years ago in a pre-service training accident: Brenda Kendall, Paul Kendall and family friend Wes Mazur. They are here today, along with the president of the Ontario Professional Fire Fighters Association, Carmen Santoro, to join us in our press conference to call for a coroner's inquest into the deaths, and also to call for regulation of the private training industry.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: It's my delight to introduce several guests from my riding of Kitchener Centre today. We have Sarah George and Catarina Costa. They are broadcasting students at Conestoga College. I just had a chat with them. Carolyn Longman is also here. She's an important team member in my constituency office.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Not to miss my opportunity, in the east members' gallery, a former member from Ottawa—Orléans in the 38th, 39th and 40th Parliaments: Mr. Phil McNeely.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I've got one check mark for you already.

In the Speaker's gallery, we have with us today a delegation from the Parliament of Romania. They are accompanied by the Romanian ambassador to Canada, Her Excellency Maria Ligor, and the Romanian consul general in Toronto, Mrs. Antonella Marinescu. We welcome them and thank them for joining us here in Ontario.

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm back.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Not for long.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On a serious note, members will be aware that there appear on today's Orders and Notices paper two notices of an opposition day to be debated in the week following constituency week.

Under standing order 43(c), the Speaker is required to select one of these notices for consideration. I would like to advise the members that the motion by Ms. Horwath is the one that I have selected for debate.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On just as serious a note, it is our tradition to say thank you, as it is the last day for our pages. We want to thank them for the work that they've done.

Applause.

ORAL QUESTIONS

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Acting Premier. Acting Premier, the Chief Electoral Officer's report into the Sudbury by-election states, "Summonses were issued requiring attendance at a designated time and place."

Acting Premier, did the Premier receive a summons from the Chief Electoral Officer or his investigators, and is that how she came to be interviewed?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The member opposite knows that the Premier has repeatedly answered questions in this House about this issue. We know that she takes it very seriously and that she is co-operating fully with the investigation.

I must say that I don't think I'm the only one in this province who finds it very, very strange that the opposition has asked nothing but questions on the Sudbury by-election for the past several weeks, to the exclusion of all others. But I do know that the opposition party cares deeply about the economy of Ontario and I know that they would want to know about some very important information about our economy that was released just this morning. This is from RBC Economics—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —and I look forward to the supplementary because I know they care about the economy. I know they want a healthy economic future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Acting Premier: Acting Premier, you know that two thirds of Ontarians think this is a very serious issue. Two thirds of Ontarians want Pat Sorbara to step aside and don't believe she should continue with her paid duties in the Premier's office.

Pretty well all Ontarians by now who pay attention to this place know that the Premier is not answering questions about the bribery scandal; she's not co-operating with the police. It's been nine weeks since the investigation was reopened in Sudbury by the OPP, and she has yet to set a date, as far as we know, to meet with the OPP.

I'm going to ask you: Is the only reason she met with the Chief Electoral Officer's investigators in a timely manner because they had the power to summons her and throw her in jail, frankly, if she didn't show up? Is that the only reason? You know the OPP doesn't have that power. They have to wait for her to say yes to a meeting. Is the only reason she showed up the threat of a summons?

1040

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I find the innuendo underlying that question beneath the dignity of the interim leader of the opposition party. The member knows that the Premier takes this very seriously. He knows that she's co-operating fully with the investigation.

I do think it's important to think about a bigger issue, and that is the economy of this province. RBC reported

today that, "Ontario is expected to top provincial economic growth rankings in 2015, something that has not happened since 2000, according to the ... RBC Economics Provincial Outlook."

Listen to this. I know people want to hear this: "RBC forecasts real GDP growth for the province to accelerate from an estimated 2.5%"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please wrap up.

Hon. Deborah Matthews:—"to a five-year-best rate of 3.3% in 2015." That is great news for the people of this province, the people we all represent. This is great news. We should be applauding this news.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Acting Premier: It took six weeks for the Premier to meet with the Chief Electoral Officer's investigators into the bribery allegations. It has now been over nine weeks since the OPP reopened their investigation into the allegations. We know now that the only reason the Premier met in a somewhat timely manner with the Chief Electoral Officer's investigators is because she was subpoenaed, and we all know that the OPP doesn't have those powers. They can request an interview, and you have to voluntarily go for an interview.

Acting Premier, can you tell me what other citizen in the province of Ontario can just put the OPP off for over nine weeks, thumb their nose at investigators and then come into this place and pretend that they're co-operating with the investigation? That doesn't hold water. The people of Ontario see right through it.

Tell us: What's the real reason why the Premier is stalling her meeting with the OPP?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I completely reject the inuendo and the suggestion in that question. The Premier is co-operating fully, as she has said in this House several times. She's setting up that meeting with the OPP.

But let's talk about the economic growth in this province. "RBC notes that economic developments over the past several months have been overwhelmingly favourable for Ontario's economy.

"The plunge in oil prices, sliding value of the Canadian dollar, surprise interest rate cut by the Bank of Canada and mounting evidence of the US economy hitting its stride—these factors should all boost growth in Ontario"—that's great news, not for the government but for all of the people of this province—"said Craig Wright, senior vice-president and chief economist, RBC. 'The positive effects from the drop in oil prices and related developments will coalesce at a time when the provincial economy is already displaying rising momentum.'"

They're not asking any other questions because there are no questions that are priorities for them.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Sylvia Jones: We're asking questions because we're trying to get to the bottom of scandal.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): For who, please?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Today, I wrote to the Information and Privacy Commissioner to ask that he begin an immediate investigation to ensure that appropriate documentation retention procedures have been followed by the Premier's office in relation to the Sudbury by-election. It's pretty clear that your Premier intends to stand by Pat Sorbara while she is under active investigation.

Please explain: What steps have been taken to ensure emails, memos and all documentation regarding the Sudbury by-election have been preserved for the police investigation?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As the Premier has said, the investigation is happening outside this House by people who are competent and trained to conduct such investigations. We're seeing a lot of amateur detection work here. The Premier is co-operating fully with the appropriate officials when it comes to this investigation.

Let's talk about the economy. What RBC said today is that "In 2014, there was clear evidence that activity picked up, particularly in the trade sector where merchandise exports grew by 8% in nominal terms." Congratulations to the minister responsible for trade. "Also encouraging, nearly all major export categories recorded gains, including consumer goods (up 14.4%) and motor vehicles and parts (up 8.5%)."

This is fantastic news for Ontario and it demonstrates we're focused on the important—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Stop the clock, please.

Before I move to the supplementary, I'm going to remind the member and anyone else answering that you relate it to the question.

Supplementary?

Ms. Sylvia Jones: The only reason you don't want us to ask any of these questions is because there is a stench surrounding the Sudbury by-election and we have a right to know the answers. I'm concerned that history is repeating itself right now because the Premier has refused to ask her deputy chief of staff to step down while the OPP investigations are ongoing.

It's beyond belief to think that absolutely no records exist: memos, like a list of the pros and cons of what the problems would be if you took on an NDP MP; the process of how you were going to eliminate your former candidate. Where are those records and are they being protected? Why should the people of Ontario believe that that documentation hasn't already been deleted?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We take our obligations very seriously when it comes to document retention. We are committed to being open, accountable and transparent. They can throw all the mud they want but we are committed to being open and transparent. We promised to open up government completely. We've done so to an unprecedented degree, certainly far more than when your party was in office.

In fact, it's not just me saying this. The Information and Privacy Commissioner credited our government with

improving record-keeping across government. A directive was sent to all political staff. Mandatory training programs are being implemented. Chiefs of staff are accountable for record-keeping. We're improving archiving requirements. The Premier's office worked with the Integrity Commissioner and the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

The accountability act prohibits the wilful deletion of records and creates—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: If this is their idea of open and accountable, I would hate to see their definition of transparency.

Two OPP investigations have been launched into the actions of Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed Jr. While these investigations continue, both Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed remain in their jobs.

The best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour. Liberals have a history of deleting emails and changing their story when it came to the gas plant cancellation. Is that what we can expect with the Sudbury by-election debacle?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, you don't have to take my word for it. Let's listen to what the Information and Privacy Commissioner had to say. She said, "I have appreciated the co-operation I have received from Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Minister of Government Services.... the Premier issued a directive in accordance with the recommendations made in the report and committed the government to greater transparency and accountability.... In addition, political staff received in-depth training on their record retention responsibilities. I applaud these developments." Let me repeat: The Information and Privacy Commissioner said, "I applaud these developments."

I will listen more to the Information and Privacy Commissioner than I will to the member opposite.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Deputy Premier. On February 17, the first day of this session, the Premier said, "My responsibility is to answer honestly.... Ontarians deserve to understand exactly what happened."

Four weeks later, instead of answering questions and explaining anything, the Premier has been hiding behind a police investigation, and she's too busy holding photo ops beside oversized birth certificates and giant porcupines to meet with OPP officials.

Yesterday, we suggested that the Premier take question period off in the morning. I just want to know if the Deputy Premier can confirm that the Premier is being interviewed by the OPP on her knowledge and role in the Sudbury by-election scandal at this very moment.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: The leader of the NDP knows full well and first-hand that it's not appropriate to comment on a police investigation.

On December 11 last year, the leader of the NDP held a press conference at the Queen's Park media studio. She

was questioned on criminal allegations against an NDP candidate. Here's what the leader of the third party had to say: "Right now, this is a matter that's in front of the police.... I can't talk about details at this point because the police are investigating."

1050

She was asked over and over again and kept with the same answer. So I don't know why the leader of the third party thinks there are two standards: one for her and one for the Premier. When the police are investigating, we leave the investigation to the police.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, perhaps I can move the issue at hand along a little bit. I'm pretty sure that the Premier and the Deputy Premier have staff who watch question period every single day—perhaps even Pat Sorbara is watching question period—and they can write this down: 705-329-6111. You can call that number and you can ask for the corruption branch of the anti-rackets squad. You can tell them your name and the name of the Premier. They'll know who you are, however. After four investigations—trust me—they'll know who you are.

I'll give you the number again. That number is 705-329-6111. Will the Deputy Premier call the OPP? Will she have her Premier call the OPP at that number and schedule that interview before the end of the day?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Deputy Premier.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, if the leader of the third party wants to hear some numbers, I've got some great numbers. Let me read again the RBC economic growth rankings, their provincial outlook that was released just this morning: "RBC forecasts real GDP growth"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order. You can make all the gestures you want. I'll make the decision. You don't need to.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): And if you say one more word, you're out.

The answer is to come towards the question, please. Carry on.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Let me thank the leader of the third party for that phone number. Thank you for that number.

Let's talk about numbers that really matter, Speaker: "RBC forecasts real GDP growth for the province to accelerate from an estimated 2.5% in 2014"—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): New question.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: This is the final supplementary, Speaker.

Yesterday, the Premier said she would answer substantially when the question is appropriate to the place. Is the Premier so arrogant that she thinks that just because a question is inconvenient, it's also inappropriate?

I disagree with that, Speaker. It shouldn't take the armed detectives in the corruption unit to get simple answers to simple questions. Can the Deputy Premier explain why the Premier—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Economic Development, come to order.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: —can avoid investigators for six weeks, while the average Ontarian—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'm sorry. While I'm asking him to come to order, he continues—the Minister of Economic Development.

Please finish.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Can the Deputy Premier explain why the Premier can avoid investigators for six weeks, when the average Ontarian involved in a criminal investigation is expected to co-operate fully and quickly with police investigations?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, let me repeat: The Premier is co-operating fully with the police investigation. It doesn't matter—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton, come to order—second time.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —how many times they suggest that she is not. The truth is, she is.

That investigation is happening. It is happening outside this House, by people who are qualified to conduct such investigations. The Premier is co-operating fully.

Meanwhile, both opposition parties have neglected all of the issues that are important to their constituents, by focusing on throwing mud, muckraking and skulduggery. Speaker, I think it's time to talk about issues that are really important to the people of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Given my particular moment right now, I'm going to ask the member to withdraw.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also to the Deputy Premier. It's clearly not in the interests of the Liberal Party, the Premier or her government for the Premier to answer questions about the Sudbury bribery scandal. On the other hand, it is in the interests of the people of Ontario to get some answers about who offered bribes to Andrew Olivier and who gave the orders.

Will the Deputy Premier stop putting the Liberal Party ahead of Ontarians and start giving honest answers to honest questions like, "Who was pulling the strings in the bribery scandal that happened in Sudbury?"

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I think anybody watching at home would like to know what this is all about, so let's just review a little bit of history.

In the last general election, the NDP won the seat of Sudbury. The member took his place. A few months later, he resigned, creating a by-election. The NDP federal MP made a very difficult but I think very wise decision, and that was to leave the New Democratic Party to join the Liberal Party, to leave the House of Commons to join the Ontario election. The people of Sudbury made a very clear and wise decision to send Glenn Thibeault to this House to be their representative.

I know that—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know that it's very difficult when you lose a member of your party to another party—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Yesterday, the Minister of the Environment said it was a great day in his life "when Premier Wynne told us who our candidate in Sudbury was going to be." Minister after minister went on the record yesterday arrogantly endorsing what the OPP and Elections Ontario have described as criminal activity.

Who in the cabinet and the caucus did the Premier share her plans with to offer Andrew Olivier jobs or appointments in exchange for stepping aside in order that Glenn Thibeault could run without any opposition?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I simply reject the allegations within that question. In the Ontario Liberal Party, in our constitution, which has been debated and passed by the membership of this party, the leader of the party has the right to appoint candidates. That does not happen in the New Democratic Party, but it does happen in the Liberal Party.

When the Premier met Mr. Thibeault, when he indicated to her that he was prepared to change parties and change the level of government, she was very pleased and she decided that he would be the candidate. There is nothing untoward about that. That is a decision that is the right of the leader. She made that decision, she exercised her right, and now we have Glenn Thibeault as a member of this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Since election day in Sudbury, Ontarians have learned that the corruption unit of the anti-rackets branch is investigating the Premier and her inner circle for bribery; that Ontario's Chief Electoral Officer believes Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed were offering bribes to get Andrew Olivier out of the way of Glenn Thibeault, something that is punishable with a jail term; and that, while evidence has come to light that shows bribery, the Premier can't show a single piece of evidence that backs her version of the story.

The Premier insisted that the bad old days were behind us, and yet here we are again, Speaker. Why do Liberals never, ever seem to change?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We just get stronger, and I'm very pleased that the Liberal Party is getting stronger.

If we're going to talk about how nomination races are run in this House, I think we do have to revisit what happened in Scarborough–Guildwood during the by-election in 2013. There was a long-standing party member named Amarjeet Kaur Chhabra, an extraordinary woman who was hoping to run as the candidate there. The party brought in Adam Giambrone to make sure the process was fair, and then, as a surprise to everyone—I can't imagine anyone was more surprised than Amarjeet Kaur Chhabra—presto, Adam Giambrone became the candidate.

If you want to call that a fair nomination process—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: —I would like to disagree. I would like to know about the conversation that the leader of the third party had with Amarjeet. I'd like to know how she explained to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

1100

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Steve Clark: My question is to the Acting Premier. Last night, your party's official Twitter account retweeted Pat Sorbara. Her tweet read, "Happy to introduce @GlennThibeault to folks at @OntLiberal Heritage Dinner 2015. Hanging with friends, raising money." Attached was a photo of the two of them as she obviously paraded Mr. Thibeault around.

Deputy Premier, Pat Sorbara was found to be in apparent contravention of the Election Act. She is under investigation in two open OPP investigations. Does the arrogance of the Office of the Premier know no bounds?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I am happy to say that we had a wonderful event last night. The Premier gave a wonderful speech. We had an outstanding number of people there and extraordinary support for the Premier's speech. In fact, I heard many people say it was the best political speech they had ever heard.

It was an extraordinary speech. She outlined her vision for the province. She talked about what it is we're doing to build Ontario up. It was an excellent evening. I will be happy to get you a copy of the speech because I think you would like to know what she was talking about.

Speaker, we're focused on growing the economy. We're delighted to see that RBC today said that our economy is growing faster than they had anticipated. That's great news.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Steve Clark: Back to the Acting Premier: That answer and Pat Sorbara's tweet are a pure display of arrogance and utter disdain for the Chief Electoral Officer and the Ontario Provincial Police's open investigations.

As the Premier's office computers remain insecure and information vulnerable, we wait as the Premier continues to duck the OPP. We've waited over nine weeks

since I asked for this investigation to be reopened. That's a lot of time to make sure people's stories are aligned.

My question: Acting Premier, after the photo and the tweet went out, did Pat Sorbara and Glenn Thibeault get their stories straight?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): No, I'm loath to say this, but as soon as I get quiet is not the time for you to take advantage.

Deputy Premier?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, we had a great event last night. It was a very rousing speech. If the member opposite wants to spend his time analyzing Twitter accounts, that's fine with me, I guess.

But our focus is on a growing and stronger economy. We were very pleased this morning to see that RBC Economics is projecting continuing and accelerated growth for our economy. They're not the only ones. The latest forecast by TD Economics calls for Ontario to post the strongest growth in the country. Let's look at what the Conference Board of Canada says: Ontario's economy is projected to grow by 2.9% this year, bolstered by strong exports and consumer spending.

This is great news. I hope that the opposition does not consider this to be bad news, because this is fantastic news for your constituents and for our constituents.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The continuing bad news is the arrogance of this government.

My question is to the Deputy Premier. For five weeks now, the Ontario Provincial Police have been trying to get an appointment with your Premier in order to continue their investigation into the bribery scandal in Sudbury. We thought maybe, when we didn't see the Premier show up, that she was, in fact, meeting with them today. That not being—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member knows full well that you're not to mention anyone's attendance in this place. I would remind him: If he does it again, he'll lose his question.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I withdraw, Speaker, and you're completely right.

The Premier has an opportunity next week during constituency week; there's a whole week for her to be able to meet with the OPP. Is the Premier prepared to set up a meeting with the OPP in order to be investigated by the OPP?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the Premier has said repeatedly that that meeting is being set up.

I don't know why the opposition continues to squander their questions in question period on questions that have already been answered. There are many issues facing the people of this province, and we are not hearing those issues raised by the members of the opposition. We

are not hearing issues about homelessness. We are not hearing issues about poverty. We are not hearing issues about the environment or climate change. We haven't had one question on rail safety or Gogama.

These are important issues in the ridings represented by these members, and they are choosing to spend their time in question period, as is their right, on trying to destroy the reputation of the Premier. They're off base, Speaker, and they should focus on issues that matter to their constituents.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Again to the Deputy Premier: What is really galling in this entire thing is that the Premier's office staff—Ms. Pat Sorbara and Mr. Lougheed—have been found in contravention of an apparent breach of the Election Act. They are being investigated by the OPP for breaking the Criminal Code when it comes to their actions in this bribery scandal, and you're not taking it seriously. You come into this House over and over again, we ask the questions, and you never answer. You're trying to stonewall what has to happen in this case.

So I ask you again: Is the Premier prepared to meet with the Ontario Provincial Police next week, during constituency week, to answer questions about the Sudbury bribery scandal?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, if the member opposite wants to apply to be the scheduling assistant to the Premier, I'm sure we can get the phone number where you can make that application. The Premier has said over and over again that she's co-operating fully, that she is setting up a meeting with the OPP. I don't think there's a vacancy there, but if the member from Timmins-James Bay wants to apply for that job, I'll hand-deliver that application.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Grant Crack: My question is to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. Speaker, it's great to see my former colleague MPP Phil McNeely up in the audience. He was a great champion of climate change awareness. Welcome.

Climate change is real. It's one of the greatest challenges of our time and poses a threat to our infrastructure, our food supply, our drinking water and our economic competitiveness.

I'd like to thank the minister for joining me this morning as we talked about my motion at a press conference on climate change. My motion will be debated this afternoon, and I'm calling upon all members of this House to recognize that climate change affects all of us and requires immediate action.

Speaker, through you, could the minister please inform this House on the importance of raising the issue of climate change above partisan politics, and if he intends to support my motion?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It will be a great honour to support the member's motion. I also want to acknow-

ledge the former member, who continues to be an active voice in policy development. Thank you very much, Phil, and thank you, Grant.

We're very concerned about this. We've seen it around the world now. In the United Kingdom, all three parties, in open votes in the British Parliament, endorsed this. We saw this in New Zealand and, more recently, in Norway, where they have had open votes, asking all members of their Legislature to put it forward as a unanimous legislative position so that governments can act on solutions and not fight this.

Mr. Speaker, it is our hope that this opportunity this afternoon will see all 107 members in the House today. I think it would be a very powerful statement of unity if we could do that.

When you look at the results of what happened in Norway, what happened in the UK and what happened in New Zealand, it triggered a level of momentum behind it and gave confidence to industry to act—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Grant Crack: Thank you, Minister, for that response. It's great to hear that you'll be supporting my motion this afternoon.

It's unfortunate that the opposition aren't focused on the priorities of what matters to Ontarians. Climate change is a great challenge—the greatest challenge of our time. As I mentioned in my previous question, it's going to be affecting our food supply, our infrastructure, our drinking water, our agricultural community and our economic competitiveness.

I'd like to ask the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change about our government's actions to combat climate change here in Ontario. I know that in Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, we have a lot of agricultural producers that have concerns about the changing temperatures and the impacts that they have on their crops, their livestock and their ability to continue with stable production.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Can he inform the House about what action the government is taking to combat climate change?

1110

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I want to again thank the member. The last five years have seen, globally, the highest level of GHG emissions. Later this year in Paris, the world will gather to try and yet again hammer out another agreement. After 20 years of agreements, we will probably see the next five years being at very high levels of emissions, because it would take five years to implement the Paris agreement, if we're successful in getting it.

This government is working with Quebec and British Columbia and California and some national governments around the world to broker meaningful reductions. Why is this important to Ontarians, Mr. Speaker? Part of it is, in 2012, we lost 80% of our apple crop. In the years since, we've lost as much as 60%.

When you think of something as basic to Ontario's food security and food supply and our economy as an

apple—when it's hard to grow those, you know this is a problem.

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I wasn't going to go down there, but I'm being heckled. The member for Nepean-Carleton should read the Pentagon's analysis of ISIS. That wasn't me.

The member from Carleton-Mississippi Mills—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Sorry.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's it.

New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Premier.

Interjection.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: She must be at the OPP meeting. I guess it's to the Acting Premier—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That doesn't make me happy at all. If it happens again, you'll lose your question.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Sorry, Speaker.

The question is to the Acting Premier. Acting Premier, last night at your heritage dinner, the Premier is quoted as saying, "When people ask me when are you going to slow down, the simple answer is I am not."

Acting Premier, why does this not apply to scheduling interviews with the police?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the Premier did say last night that she's not slowing down. I tell you, we are all amazed at the energy of our Premier, and she gave a fantastic speech last night. She has been to more community events; she has met with more people. She is as energetic and committed a Premier as we could ever hope to find. So you're right: She's not slowing down.

Is she scheduling a meeting with the OPP? I think you've heard repeatedly that that is under way. Again, if you want to apply for the job as scheduling assistant to the Premier, I will hand-deliver your resumé as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, if I gave her my resumé, she'd probably delete it, with her staff.

Mr. Speaker, it has been nine weeks since the investigation was reopened. It has been over five weeks since we learned that the OPP requested an interview. Acting Premier, has the interview with the OPP been scheduled?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, as the Premier has said over and over again, that meeting is being scheduled. I don't think the OPP are complaining. Maybe you know they are; I don't think they are.

What I can tell you, though, is that in this by-election—I understand why the PCs are unhappy with the outcome of the by-election.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean-Carleton.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: It doesn't happen very often that the opposition party loses its deposit. In fact, I believe they ran fourth in the by-election. So I think that if you're going to be focusing on Sudbury, there might be other things you could be focusing on.

Let's actually think about what happened. The Premier became aware that Glenn Thibeault, the sitting federal member, was interested in crossing to the Liberal Party and running provincially. We were delighted and thrilled that a man of this calibre wanted to make that change, to represent his constituents here, and that's exactly what happened.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Attorney General. Criminal defence lawyers often caution their clients about making statements to the police. That's because anything said can be used in a future prosecution. In fact, legal counsel often advises clients, if arrested, to exercise their right to remain silent.

Has the Attorney General advised the Premier to exercise her right to remain silent, and has the Attorney General cautioned her about making statements to the police?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Let me talk about the good news that happened in Sudbury after the election.

Hon. James J. Bradley: They're sore losers.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Yes, because the Premier did an excellent job in exercising her right to choose this wonderful candidate of ours, Glenn Thibeault. Last week on Monday night, I had quite a few francophones who came to me and said, "Us, in Sudbury, we're very happy to have Glenn Thibeault as our representative."

So the Premier did an excellent job, and I want to congratulate her.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Perhaps the Attorney General can't advise whether or not she has given that advice, but perhaps the Attorney General can advise whether the Premier sought independent counsel and if that independent counsel has provided advice to the Premier on whether or not she should exercise her right to remain silent, or whether or not this independent counsel perhaps has advised the Premier and cautioned her about making a statement to the police.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: First of all, like I said yesterday, I am not involved in the investigation. I'm not involved in anything related to the Sudbury election.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. The deputy House leader is using somebody else's mike, and he will come to order.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: It was made very clear by the Chief Electoral Officer in a letter that was sent to their House leader, Gilles Bisson—a copy of the letter that I have here—about the process. I hope that he has informed all of his caucus about the process. If not, I will say that it's about time that he informs his caucus about the process and how the Attorney General is left out of this exercise.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mrs. Laura Albanese: It is unfortunate that the opposition are neglecting to ask questions about government policies these days.

My question is to the Minister of Labour. Speaker, through you to the minister: Workers who live in my riding have been on strike from their jobs at Crown Metal Packaging for 18 months. They are concerned. It has been very hard for their families, since they have been on the picket line for all these months. We all know how cold it has been this winter, and despite this, Crown Metal workers continue to walk the picket line.

I'm not sure everyone is aware, but a group of these workers went out and looked for and found little Elijah Marsh, the three-year-old boy who tragically died in Toronto 10 days ago.

Speaker, through you to the minister: What can you tell the people of York South–Weston and neighbouring ridings about this situation?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I really do want to thank the member from York South–Weston for that very important question.

Crown Metal operates a beverage and food manufacturing plant in Weston. The Steelworkers represent 133 employees at that plant. They've had a strike at that facility since September 6. Under section 42 of the Labour Relations Act, my ministry conducted what's called the "last offer vote" on March 24 of last year. The employees voted overwhelmingly to reject the offer.

We've had a labour mediator in to assist both parties. He remains in touch but, as the member noted in her question, our government and all Ontarians are increasingly concerned that this dispute still is not being resolved. It's the responsibility of the employer and the union to reach an agreement, but I want to be very clear, Speaker: I'm, in the strongest possible terms, urging both parties to get back to that table and to reach a resolution to this issue.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Back to the Minister of Labour, whom I would like to thank for the reply and for addressing this important issue before the House.

Just this week, we've heard of the extreme lengths that Crown Metal—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. Come to order, please.

I would like that the debates back and forth not take place during question and answer period unless you're putting the question or giving the answer. Please finish.

1120

Mrs. Laura Albanese: Thank you.

Just this week I was saying, we've heard of the extreme lengths that Crown Metal employees are taking to be heard. The United Steelworkers issued a news release noting that they had been leafleting the homes and businesses of the crown's board of directors overseas.

Can the minister provide further details on how the Ontario Labour Relations Act governs disputes like this?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I thank the member again for raising this important issue, and we should all applaud her for standing up for her constituents in this regard.

The length of a strike or a lockout is far from business as usual in this province, Speaker. Last year, over 98% of contract negotiations were resolved without any—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Transportation, come to order. The member from Essex, come to order.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thank you, Speaker.

In this case, however, the workers have been off the job for 18 months. It's not good for business; it's not good for the workers; it's not good for anybody in this province. The Labour Relations Act contains provisions and processes that assist the parties to reach a collective agreement. On the rare occasions where they don't work, special action may be required. That includes a section 42 final offer vote we already undertook. It includes other powers, though, which are used under only extraordinary circumstances.

It's essential to understand that the best deals are made at the table, but as strongly as I can, I'm urging those parties back to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Just last week the new member from Sudbury was promoted and became parliamentary assistant to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. I can't help but note—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Please put your question.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I can't help but note that this means he will receive a 13% pay increase after a mere four weeks on the job. We know Pat Sorbara offered Mr. Olivier an appointment to step down as the candidate for Sudbury. But my question to you is this: Was the PA perk offered by Pat Sorbara to the member from Sudbury to cross the floor and step up as candidate?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: To the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It's the first question from my critic almost on an environment issue—almost.

You know, the position of the Conservatives has been that they'll take positions after they have a new leader, apparently. I guess we'll wait till then to find out when they ask a question.

But we have some real problems in your part of Ontario, where we lost 80% of our apple crop in 2012—we have a 60% loss.

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The member says it's north of her. I guess she doesn't care; if it's not in your backyard, you don't care about farmers.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Please finish.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: She wants to bring, inappropriately, a police investigation into this House. She doesn't care about apple farmers because she doesn't represent apple farmers, apparently. She doesn't care about rural Ontario, apparently. That's really a problem. They don't care about climate change, because the member for Mississippi Mills says CO₂ is a positive gas.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Sadly, Speaker, there's a lot of hot air in this House.

But I want to go back to the Deputy Premier. Last night, we saw how close Mr. Thibeault and Pat Sorbara were. According to Twitter, she was responsible for parading him around your fundraiser like a show horse. She wasn't letting him too far off the harness. And just today, Mr. Thibeault confirmed in an exchange with one of my colleagues that he has been asked to meet with the OPP.

My question is this: When are the Premier and Mr. Thibeault going to meet with the OPP?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Actually, I'm sure that the new parliamentary assistant—

Interjections.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I am sure that Mr. Thibeault will meet with whoever wants to meet with Mr. Thibeault. As a matter of fact, he doesn't wait: Mr. Thibeault went up to Gogama to be on the ground, taking pictures, sharing information. We're working together right now, because we just got the results of the surface water studies and water supply studies for Timmins and for Gogama. We would like to talk about that in the House, but they're not asking questions about basic things like the safety of the water supply.

But then, the Tories have a long history on the safety of the water supply. We thought that they had learned that water supply and protecting the water supply was important. Surely, the member from Huron-Bruce would know better than any other member in the House how important it is for the opposition to hold the government to account for safe water. We just had one of the worst spills ever, Mr. Speaker. We haven't had a question from the member for Huron-Bruce, from Walkerton—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Pat Sorbara is facing a criminal investigation for her role in Glenn Thibeault's nomination. Instead of showing any contrition, last night, Ms. Sorbara tweeted a photo of herself with Glenn Thibeault at a Liberal fundraiser. This is Liberal arrogance at its best. Pat Sorbara

thinks she's above the law. She thinks she's above contrition, just like the rest of the Liberal members.

Does the Deputy Premier think it's—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would appreciate very much not elevating this debate in the way it has just been done, particularly those people who are trying to tell me that the other side needs reprimanding any more than the other side does.

Please put your question.

Miss Monique Taylor: Thank you, Speaker. Does the Deputy Premier think it's appropriate for Ms. Sorbara to be that arrogant when she's facing two police investigations connected to Mr. Thibeault's nomination?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the NDP's line of questioning on this, I think, reveals—I don't know quite how to say it, and any word I use you will ask me to withdraw. So what I will say is that the NDP knows full well and first-hand that it is inappropriate to comment on police investigations.

Let me remind you: On December 11 last year, the leader of the NDP held a press conference in the media studio. She was questioned on criminal allegations against an NDP candidate. Allow me to read to you what the leader of the third party said during the press conference. She said, "Right now, this is a matter that's in front of the police." She said, "I can't talk about the details at this point because the police are investigating."

The member was asked time and time again. After 14 times, she said, "I'm not going to talk about this" anymore.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Miss Monique Taylor: Back to the Deputy Premier: The OPP and Elections Ontario say Pat Sorbara offered bribes to Andrew Olivier to get out of the Premier's way, so she wouldn't have to appoint Glenn Thibeault.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Government Services.

Miss Monique Taylor: Instead of stepping down, Pat Sorbara is throwing it in the face of Ontarians. She's saying that she doesn't care about two police investigations; she doesn't care about the integrity of the Premier's office. Because she's a Liberal, she thinks she knows better than the police, better than Elections Ontario and better than Ontarians.

This is about what is good for the people of this province. Does the Deputy Premier really think that this is appropriate?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, I recall fondly the days when the member opposite asked questions about children. As the critic of children and youth services, she asked questions about children. I know that the Minister of Children and Youth Services was always prepared to answer those questions. But for four solid weeks, we have had no questions—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Carry on.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: As I say, I remember fondly the days when we actually got questions—I would have expected questions on Hydro One. I would have expected questions on conversion therapy today, but we didn't get them.

Let's review again what happened: In the 2014 general election, the NDP won the seat for Sudbury, Speaker. Fewer than five months later, the NDP's brand new MPP resigned his seat, and that forced—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Mr. Speaker, I have an important question for the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure on government business that is of high concern to my constituents, unlike the questions from the opposition, which aren't even focused on government business that matters to Ontarians.

I would like to thank the minister for recently updating this House—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): If this persists, I will continue to allow the clock to finish.

1130

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: Our government's position on federal Bill C-40, An Act respecting the Rouge National Park, which is part of my riding: The minister clearly stated that the federal bill, as it stood, failed to provide the necessary protection for the Rouge's environmental integrity. As a result of the federal government's inability to put forward legislation with strong ecological requirements, our government, in good faith, could not transfer provincially owned lands.

Mr. Speaker, would the minister please update this House on the developments?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I want to thank the member for the question and I want to thank him for his passion for ensuring that we do what we need to do to protect the Rouge Valley lands.

Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to collaborate very closely with our environmental stakeholders and to consult very intimately with our farming community in the Rouge Valley, and we were able to draft up proposed amendments and submit them to the Clerk of the Senate committee that's looking into the proposed Rouge park. Those amendments struck a fair balance between protecting the ecological future of the park while promoting its vibrant farming community.

I'm extremely disappointed at this point in time that the federal government seems bent on ignoring these very constructive opportunities, I think, for us to work together. This was a constructive attempt to provide an opportunity for the federal government to strengthen their legislation up to the level of the provincial legislation. Thus far, that attempt has been rejected by the federal government. It's a sad day for the environment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I would like to thank the minister for that update and also his tireless work to protect these lands. Embodied in these proposed legislative amendments were key improvements that would have truly enhanced the park while bringing all partners to the table. It was short-sighted for the federal Conservatives not to adopt these proposed amendments that would significantly strengthen the piece of legislation.

I understand that this morning, in fact, the Senate committee examining this bill started its clause-by-clause review. Senator Eggleton, a strong advocate for the Rouge, brought forward the minister's proposed amendments. Would the minister please update the House on the committee's response to his proposed amendments brought forward by Senator Eggleton?

Hon. Brad Duguid: I thank the member again for the supplementary, and I want to thank Senator Eggleton for putting forward these very constructive amendments. Unfortunately, again, the federal Conservatives have rejected a fair compromise in rejecting these amendments this morning.

The federal government's mixed agenda on the environment and their obstinate behaviour in working with our government and the stakeholder community has blown an opportunity for the Rouge. This government and I will not turn our backs on those who have dedicated their lives to protect these lands. We will not let the federal government weaken these important protections, because they are important protections not just for us today, but for future generations. We will not sell out our commitment to the ecological future of these lands. We have the support of the opposition parties, so that makes me confident that there will be a Rouge national park. It may not be this government that delivers it, but we will get what we want. But we'll make sure it's done in the right way to protect farming and to protect—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is to the Deputy Premier. Deputy Premier, everyone knows the history of record retention in the Liberal Premier's office. The old tradition was to designate a staff member to double-delete and wipe the hard drives.

But this Premier said she is different. Acting Premier, has the Premier designated a staff member to preserve all documents, records and emails that would assist the OPP in their bribery investigation?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services.

Hon. David Orzietti: I appreciate the question. I think the member knows full well the steps that have been taken by our government with respect to record retention, the training that has gone on with staff and the comments that have been made by the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

I want to congratulate Brian Beamish on being the new privacy commissioner for the province of Ontario. I

think he's going to be fantastic at this particular position and has conducted himself quite well with respect to his acting role.

Our government has taken a number of steps, including expanding disclosure around freedom-of-information requests and also record retention. We've made it an offence to be deleting or not providing information—up to \$5,000. I think the members know quite well, because, they, as government members in the past, have conducted themselves with respect to the freedom-of-information requests in a similar manner to all governments over the years, and that information—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Again, back to the Deputy Premier: I'm truly hoping that you have all of the emails and documents regarding the Sudbury by-election safe and secure.

Since the—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. The Deputy House leader is warned.

Please finish.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Since the Premier keeps telling everyone here that she is co-operating with the authorities, I ask you this, Madam Deputy Premier: Will it require a warrant or will the Premier's office voluntarily turn any records relating to the Sudbury scandal over to the OPP?

Hon. David Oraziatti: I'm pleased to talk about the government's record with respect to record retention. Here's what the Information and Privacy Commissioner said: "I am pleased to report that the Premier and the government have made significant progress" in this area. I appreciate "the co-operation I have received from Premier Kathleen Wynne" in regard to this matter.

I say to the opposition—it's been said, the Premier has indicated this—you will have the full co-operation of the government with respect to all investigation matters. The opposition continues to insist that we try this matter in the Legislature. It's an OPP investigation. Let the OPP do their job.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Michael Mantha: Mr. Speaker, good morning to you. My question is to the Deputy Premier. I just don't understand. It's been four weeks of questions; zero answers. Why can't the Premier answer just a simple question? Those are questions that people across my riding in northern Ontario and this province are asking. Instead, the Premier dips, dodges, dives—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Mr. Michael Mantha: —ducks and then pitches the ball and—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. You will come to order.

Please finish.

Mr. Michael Mantha: The Premier dips, dodges, dives and ducks, then pitches the ball and pulls a Dalton, and hides behind her House leader.

Will the Deputy Premier tell Ontarians who the other people are that the Premier has called to step out of the way, and were they offered bribes as well?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I know the member opposite, who is the critic for northern development and mines, wants to ask about Gogama. I know he desperately wants to ask that question about his hometown. I know he is being prevented from asking that question by the party leadership.

But I do think we have to really think about what Glenn Thibeault, as parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Climate Change, has done in the short time that he has been in this House. He was there, on-site in Gogama. I'm sure he would have information that this House would like to hear about. He was there, in his capacity as PA to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. He met with first responders. He met with residents. He met with community leaders to directly assess the impacts of this disaster in this community and to the environment.

The member opposite is asking a political question that really doesn't have anything to do with his true interests in his heart.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: I'm extremely proud of the work of our colleague from Nickel Belt and our federal member from Nickel Belt, who were actually on the ground in Gogama and did the work that was required, not in the air.

The problem with the Liberal story is that there isn't any evidence for the Premier's story. But according to the OPP and Elections Ontario, there is evidence of bribery. Let me repeat that: There is evidence of bribery.

Can the Deputy Premier provide any evidence that the Premier's version of her story is actually factual?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: While it certainly seems obvious that this member actually does care about Gogama, that he actually does want to have a discussion in this House about the response to Gogama, I just wish the questions in question period were about those issues.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence of the ballot list for private members' public business such that Ms. DiNovo assumes ballot item number 40 and Mr. Singh assumes ballot item number 74.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I'd ask the House to join me in welcoming page Dhairya Bhatt's mother, Mamta Bhatt, who is in the public gallery this morning.

DEFERRED VOTES

ONTARIO IMMIGRATION ACT, 2015
LOI DE 2015 SUR L'IMMIGRATION
EN ONTARIO

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 49, An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 / Projet de loi 49, Loi portant sur l'immigration en Ontario et apportant une modification connexe à la Loi de 1991 sur les professions de la santé réglementées.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1141 to 1146.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On December 14, 2014, Mr. Chan moved second reading of Bill 49, An Act with respect to immigration to Ontario and a related amendment to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991. Mr. Naqvi has moved that the question now be put.

All those in favour of Mr. Naqvi's motion will please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Mr. Chan has moved second reading of Bill 49. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it. I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shall we move second reading?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: You already did that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Oh yes, okay.

Shall the bill be ordered for third reading? Minister?

Hon. Michael Chan: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): So ordered.

Before we dismiss, I would like to offer to all of you a healthy break, a chance to be with family and to recoup at your constituency, and be safe. Thank you for the work that you're doing.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed.

The House recessed from 1151 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

JARED KEESO

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Today, I'm pleased to recognize the accomplishments of Jared Keeso. Jared grew up in Listowel, Ontario. He is now a well-recognized actor. Many of you may know him from playing Don Cherry in the Don Cherry Story. Last week, Jared earned a Canadian Screen Award for his work on 19-2, a Canadian cop drama. I would like to congratulate him on this win.

In his acceptance speech, Jared gave a shout-out to his former schools, Listowel Central Public School and Listowel District Secondary School. That's the sign of a gracious young man, and we in Perth-Wellington are so happy to support him.

On Thursday, Jared got even more good news. Bell Media's on-demand streaming service has commissioned its first original Canadian series: his comedy show Letterkenney. Jared will be featured in the show and will also serve as its creator, executive producer and co-writer.

Again, I would like to offer my sincere congratulations to Jared Keeso on all his excellent work. He's gone from a kid playing hockey in Listowel to an accomplished national actor. I would also like to recognize the entire Keeso family, who have helped Jared accomplish his dreams.

SALLY HOOKE

Mr. Michael Mantha: Today I would like to highlight an outstanding woman from my riding. Sally Hooke is from St. Joseph Island, and everyone knows Sally. A

Ayes

Albanese, Laura
Anderson, Granville
Armstrong, Teresa J.
Balkissoon, Bas
Ballard, Chris
Berardinetti, Lorenzo
Bisson, Gilles
Bradley, James J.
Chan, Michael
Colle, Mike
Coteau, Michael
Crack, Grant
Damerla, Dipika
Del Duca, Steven
Delaney, Bob
Dhillon, Vic
Dickson, Joe
DiNovo, Cheri
Dong, Han
Duguid, Brad
Fife, Catherine
Flynn, Kevin Daniel
Forster, Cindy
Fraser, John
French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne
Gélinas, France
Gravelle, Michael
Gretzky, Lisa
Hatfield, Percy
Hoggarth, Ann
Horwath, Andrea
Hoskins, Eric
Hunter, Mitzie
Jaczek, Helena
Kiwala, Sophie
Lalonde, Marie-France
MacCharles, Tracy
Malhi, Harinder
Mantha, Michael
Martins, Cristina
Matthews, Deborah
Mauro, Bill
McGarry, Kathryn
McMahon, Eleanor
McMeekin, Ted

Meilleur, Madeleine
Milczyn, Peter Z.
Miller, Paul
Moridi, Reza
Murray, Glen R.
Naqvi, Yasir
Natyshak, Taras
Oraziotti, David
Potts, Arthur
Qaadri, Sharif
Rinaldi, Lou
Sandals, Liz
Sattler, Peggy
Sergio, Mario
Singh, Jagmeet
Sousa, Charles
Tabuns, Peter
Takhar, Harinder S.
Taylor, Monique
Thibeault, Glenn
Vanthof, John
Vernille, Daiene
Wong, Soo

Nays

Arnott, Ted
Bailey, Robert
Clark, Steve
Hillier, Randy
Jones, Sylvia
MacLeod, Lisa
Martow, Gila
McDonnell, Jim
Miller, Norm
Pettapiece, Randy
Scott, Laurie
Smith, Todd

Thompson, Lisa M.
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim
Yurek, Jeff

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 69; the nays are 16.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

combination of life struggles and her passion for recycling began a most interesting story that is to be part of Canadian history. This is what makes this story great: One person chose to do something.

Years ago, she was going through the landfill site looking for items to be removed and recycled. She found nine timber wolf skins sewn together into what she thought was a blanket. For many years Sally took care of this blanket, thinking that it was a wonderful treasure and that she'd keep it for her own.

The blanket was recognized as a shaman's robe. The DNA testing on the shaman's robe revealed sweetgrass DNA that could be historically traced back to the Wolf Clan, who once lived on the island, 200 years ago. Sally has given the shaman's robe to the St. Joseph Island Museum so that all can enjoy this wonderful piece of Canadian history.

But there's more, Mr. Speaker. Sally has also made a tremendous impact in the community by operating the Jocelyn mall share shed. This entire idea came from Sally saving items in a box to a beautiful storage building provided by the Jocelyn township, supporting Sally's desire to help residents purchase the items, and the proceeds are donated to the local area food bank, raising over \$33,000.

Sally's compassion, big heart and desire is always looking to help those less fortunate. You can find Sally shopping down at the Jocelyn mall on beautiful St. Joseph Island, giving her time and her energy to building a stronger, healthier community.

Thank you, Sally, from me and many in need. Thank you, thank you, thank you. You're an angel.

SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD
COLLEGIATE INSTITUTE

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to recognize Sir John A. MacDonald Collegiate, a high school in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, for their leadership in wetland conservation.

Partnering with Ducks Unlimited, they have created the Wetland Centre of Excellence, providing students the opportunity to engage in conservation efforts in their own backyard.

Throughout the Wetland Centre of Excellence, Mac students participate in cleaning up trails, building boardwalks and identifying wildlife. Last spring, they led their first wetland trip for local grade 4 students, taking them through a variety of educational games and nature walks. Now the students are gearing up to lead their second field trip at the end of April.

Ducks Unlimited's visit to Queen's Park last week reminds all of us just how important these programs are in our community. After speaking with the students who participate in these programs, it is very clear that they are knowledgeable on conservation and have become advocates for Ontario's wetlands.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the teacher, Matthew Sheehan, and his students from Sir

John A. MacDonald Collegiate, as well the principal, Mr. Rick Tarasuk, for their leadership in wetland conservation and, more importantly, for being great champions of Ontario's wetlands.

POLICE

Mr. Ted Arnott: I stand in the House today to acknowledge and thank our police officers in Wellington—Halton Hills. Our riding is well served by two exceptional police forces: the Wellington OPP and the Halton Regional Police. In addition to keeping our streets safe, both police forces work hard to give back to the communities they serve.

Each year, the Wellington OPP organize a fundraiser to support the Guelph Wish Fund for Children, which gives a child facing a serious illness a wish that comes true. Our OPP also participate in the Canadian Blood Services' Partners for Life program to encourage blood donation.

Our Halton Regional Police run an annual Toys for Tots campaign to bring the joy of Christmas to needy children. Over the past four years, they've raised over a million dollars in toys, gift cards, cash and food donations. The Halton Regional Police also run a Children's Safety Village, which is a miniature town complete with buildings, paved roads and traffic signals. The village is visited by about 10,000 children per year, teaching them important safety lessons.

I want to thank all our police officers in Wellington—Halton Hills.

While we're talking about justice, I want to again raise the need for a new courthouse in Halton. The existing courthouse is aging, overcrowded, inadequate and unsafe. Today, I learned that a water leak recently disabled courtroom 3, generally used for Family Court proceedings, causing a great deal of inconvenience and disruption. Again, this underscores how decrepit the existing court facilities have become.

I know that the Attorney General is aware of the problem and all Halton area MPPs are supportive. I urge the Minister of Finance in his upcoming budget to announce the government's approval for a new courthouse for Halton.

JUNO AWARDS

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, my home city may be best known for its long heritage in steelmaking and sport, but today I rise to welcome the Juno Awards to Hamilton this weekend. This will be the sixth time that Hamilton has hosted the Junos, but the first since 2001.

We've had events all week in the buildup to the awards, with concerts taking place at venues large and small across our city. Tomorrow evening's Music Crawl is free. This Friday and Saturday, JunoFest is better than an outdoor festival. JunoFest will feature an incredible 133 artists playing at 17 venues. It's a great weekend to live in Hamilton or come to Hamilton.

You oughta know that at this year's Junos, Alanis Morissette will be inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame. Congratulations to Ontario's true international star.

Hamilton's own Arkells will be playing live at the awards. They have been nominated for Group of the Year and Rock Album of the Year.

Hamilton has a strong team of nominees this year, including Steve Strongman, Diane Panton, Elliott Brood, Blackie and the Rodeo Kings, Caribou and Daniel Lanois. Good luck to them all. We have a terrific musical community in Hamilton that we're proud of.

I hope that my colleagues and other Canadians heading to the Junos this weekend will stay around for a while to enjoy the best that Hamilton has to offer; I know some good tour guides. And if you like the Juno weekend, you'll love the Supercrawl this September. Hamilton is a great city, and if you haven't already been, there is no better time to visit us than now.

JOHNNY SETO

Mr. Granville Anderson: I rise in this House to pay tribute to one of the icons of our community, who passed away a few weeks ago. I would like to pay tribute to a one-of-a-kind Durham resident who recently passed away.

Johnny Seto was a long-time Bowmanville resident, and was perhaps best known as owner of the popular Coronation Restaurant. Johnny came from China, via Vancouver, to Whitby more than half a century ago. He used to tell stories of arriving in Whitby by train. Within a few hours of his arrival there, after a good meal, Johnny found himself working washing dishes at a family-owned restaurant. To learn English, he hired a teacher from the Ontario Ladies' College in Whitby. He would practise his English in the alleyway outside where he lived at 5:30 in the morning so he didn't disturb his sleeping family members.

Mr. Seto soon made the move to Bowmanville, where he opened a restaurant, the Coronation, which affectionately became known as "Johnny's place." Before long, everyone knew Johnny. He was well respected and well loved, and he gave much to the community. So well respected was he that in his later years, when he no longer wished to rise early to open his restaurant, he was able to entrust the key to a group of his regulars. They would come in and start the coffee, sitting at their special table. Johnny would come in later and join them.

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Johnny and his wife, MeiMei, raised a lovely family in Bowmanville. His children remain in my riding, carrying on Johnny's tradition of being active in the community. They are a wonderful legacy to him, and my thoughts are very much with them at this time.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to tell you a little bit about Johnny Seto, a Durham resident who will surely be missed and who was a great honour to our community.

COLONEL FITZGERALD BRANCH 233

Ms. Sylvia Jones: I rise today to recognize members of the Colonel Fitzgerald Branch 233 in Orangeville as they celebrate their 80th anniversary.

The Orangeville Legion has played an integral role in our community since its inception. Veterans, their families and many others are benefactors of Legion programs, outreach and support. Where there is a need in our community, our Legion and its army of volunteers are often first there to help.

Legion members in Orangeville have been very busy in recent years working with local high school students to restore, repair and preserve the weathered and worn grave markers of veterans at the Forest Lawn Cemetery. This project is especially important because it ensures that the names of our fallen comrades will not be forgotten.

Every time I attend a Remembrance Day service or an event at the Orangeville Legion, I'm reminded of the branch's distinguished record and outreach, especially with our students. Veterans visit local schools to discuss their experiences and to participate in remembrance services, as well as sponsoring many students through bursaries. Annually, our Legion holds a very popular speech competition for students.

Members of the Colonel Fitzgerald Branch 233 have much to be proud of after eight decades of community service, but their outreach to our younger generation is particularly significant. By that outreach, our veterans are helping to preserve their stories by passing along their experiences and shared memories.

Congratulations to all members, associates and volunteers of Colonel Fitzgerald Branch 233 on your significant anniversary, and thank you for your service. Lest we forget.

CONNECT SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES

Mr. Han Dong: I rise today to recognize and celebrate the achievement of the Connect School of Languages. This school is a unique, innovative and award-winning English-as-a-second-language school that is located in my riding of Trinity-Spadina. Recently, the Connect School of Languages won a very prestigious award at the 2015 Digital Book Awards.

Their innovative Study It textbook series was selected as the 2015 best digital textbook in the reference/academic category at the Digital Book Awards gala. The Study It textbook series is a customized set of interactive English-language multi-touch books which are designed for use with iPads and other tablets.

The Connect School of Languages has published over 50 different digital textbooks available for students and teachers. There are eight levels of grammar, eight levels of conversation, a listening series and a business English series. As a former English-as-second-language learner, I find great value in teaching and learning tools like the Study It textbook series. These language tools facilitate

the use of a richer English language and culture for everyone. Delivering ESL curriculum to students in a new and innovative way is also something to be celebrated and recognized.

I, along with the rest of my riding, am extremely proud of the Connect School of Languages for their hard work and commitment to creativity. I stand today inviting all Ontarians to celebrate this tremendous achievement.

NEIL YOUNG

Mr. Arthur Potts: Today I rise in honour and in memory of the former member of Parliament for Beaches–Woodbine, Mr. Neil Young.

Neil died this past Saturday, March 7 at Toronto East General Hospital, a facility that he represented and championed. He was surrounded by his family, and he was 78 years of age.

Mr. Young was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, coincidentally the ancestral home of my own family. He immigrated to Canada in the 1950s and he worked as a machinist in the electrical industry, and later became an organizer for the United Electrical Workers Union.

In 1980, as a member of the New Democratic Party, Mr. Young was elected to represent the people of Beaches–Woodbine, a precursor to the current riding of Beaches–East York. He would go on to serve the riding for nearly 14 years.

Maria Minna, who succeeded him, remembers Neil as a great gentleman and as a dedicated advocate for the issues he championed. Throughout his tenure as an MP, he represented several portfolios, including pensions and veteran's affairs, but most notable was the work he did for people with disabilities. Throughout his retirement, he continued to serve as a consultant regarding these very important matters.

Neil was an avid golfer, and while he continued his good work in his retirement, he was able to find time to hit the links every day that he could. Apparently, he was staying true to his Scottish roots; he would play rain or shine.

My sincere condolences go out to Neil's wife of 52 years, Vivien, and their children Neil, Leslie, Moira and Fraser. I did not know Neil, but I knew of him and that he served his community well and will be missed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

HELPING VOLUNTEERS GIVE BACK ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 VISANT À AIDER LES BÉNÉVOLES À CONTRIBUER

Ms. Jones moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 79, An Act respecting criminal record checks for volunteers / Projet de loi 79, Loi concernant les vérifications du casier judiciaire des bénévoles.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Thank you, Speaker. The bill may seem familiar to you, because it is a reintroduction of a bill that I've introduced in previous sessions. I feel strongly that anything that we can do as legislators to encourage volunteerism within our communities is a help to all of us collectively. Basically, my bill will allow one police record check to be used annually for multiple organizations, so I'm just simplifying the process.

PETITIONS

WIND TURBINES

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"In light of the many wide-ranging concerns being raised by Ontario citizens and 80-plus action groups across Ontario and the irrefutable international evidence of a flawed technology, health concerns, environmental effects, bird and bat kills, property losses, the tearing apart of families, friends and communities, and unprecedented costs;

"We, the undersigned, ask the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to declare an Ontario-wide moratorium on the development of wind farms."

I totally agree with this petition. I'll affix my signature and send it to the desk with Andrew.

GASOLINE PRICES

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's with great honour and privilege that I stand here today and read a petition on behalf of Mrs. Barbara Marcotte, who provided these many hundreds of signatures to the petition on gas prices. It says:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

"Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

"Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of gas-price regulation; and

"Whereas jurisdictions with gas-price regulation have seen an end to wild price fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition."

I wholeheartedly support this petition and present it to page Victoria to take it to the Clerks.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition here to the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

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"Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I wholeheartedly endorse the petition and leave it with Dhairya.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that was collected by Reginald and Claudette Carrière, from my riding, in Chelmsford. It reads as follows:

"Whereas the Liberal government of Ontario is currently reviewing proposals to sell off a significant amount of our shared public assets such as Ontario Power Generation (OPG), Hydro One, and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO); and

"Whereas our shared public assets provide more affordable hydro, develop environmentally friendly energy, create thousands of good Ontario jobs, and are accountable to all Ontarians;

"Whereas our shared public assets put money in the public bank account so we can invest in hospitals, roads and schools;

"Whereas this Liberal government is more interested in helping out wealthy shareholders and investors than they are in the hard-working Ontarians who are building this province; "

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to: "Stop the selling-off of our shared public assets. Keep our public assets in public hands."

I fully support this petition, Speaker, will affix my name to it and ask page Morgan to bring it to the Clerk.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition here addressed to the Legislature of Ontario:

"Whereas the community of Windsor-Essex county has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada resulting in stressful lives and financial inadequacies for many of its residents and businesses; and

"Whereas recently the Ford Motor Company was considering Windsor, Ontario, as a potential site for a new global engine that would create 1,000 new jobs (and as many as 7,000 spinoff jobs) for our community; and

"Whereas partnership with government was critical to secure this investment from Ford; and

"Whereas the inability of Ford and Ontario to come to an agreement for partnership contributed to the loss of this project;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To insist that the Ontario government exhaust all available opportunities to reopen the discussions around the Ford investment in Windsor and to develop a national auto strategy and review current policy meant to attract investment in the auto sector."

I agree with this petition, affix my signature and give it to page Arlyne to bring forward.

PROBATION AND PAROLE SERVICES

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas the Ontario Auditor General's report (2014) on adult community corrections, (MCSCS probation and parole) identified that Ontario has the highest caseloads in Canada. And with a 60% rate of recidivism, the Ontario Liberal government spends the second least amount of money, compared to the other provinces, on the supervision and rehabilitation of our offenders at a mere \$5.81/day per offender; and

"Whereas the Auditor General has also criticized probation and parole services for not conducting adequate offender compliance checks to monitor adherence with court ordered conditions; and

"Whereas the approximately eight hundred and fifty (850) dedicated and professional probation and parole officers in Ontario responsible for the supervision of over

50,000 adult offenders each year take great pride in providing offenders with the appropriate monitoring, rehabilitation programs and public safety services but are struggling due to chronic understaffing;

"We, the undersigned probation and parole employees, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Liberal government shall implement an offender supervision caseload cap within the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services in order to guarantee Ontario communities that probation and parole services will have the necessary staffing resources to deliver on its mandate of providing both effective offender services and ensuring public safety."

I fully support this petition, will gladly sign my name to it and give it to Dhairya.

STUDENT SAFETY

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have another petition here addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas there are no mandatory requirements for teachers and school volunteers to have completed CPR training in Ontario;

"Whereas the primary responsibility for the care and safety of students rests with each school board and its employees;

"Whereas the safety of children in elementary schools in Ontario should be paramount;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To work in conjunction with all Ontario school boards to ensure that adequate CPR training is available to school employees and volunteers."

I wholeheartedly support this petition. I affix my name and give it to page Fardin.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE

M^{me} France G  linas: I have this petition that comes from Erika Graham from my riding. It reads as follows:

"Whereas over 2,400 students and 450 Everest staff are impacted by the 14 college location closures across Ontario...; and

"Whereas students have the right to finish their programs" and "avoid unnecessary delays...; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has been aware of the financial and legal difficulties facing Everest" for quite a few months; and

"Whereas students cannot afford to put their life on hold...;"

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"To act in a prompt manner" so that the interests of the Sudbury Everest students are protected so they can complete their programs without delay.

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Dhairya to bring it to the Clerk.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I have a petition here addressed to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I support the petition, affix my name and give it to page Muntder to bring it forward.

PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLIC ASSETS

Mr. Wayne Gates: A petition: Ontario is not for sale.

"Whereas the Liberal government of Ontario is currently reviewing proposals to sell off a significant amount of our shared public assets such as Ontario Power Generation (OPG), Hydro One, and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO); and

"Whereas our shared public assets provide more affordable hydro, develop environmentally friendly energy, create thousands of" good-paying "jobs, and are accountable to all Ontarians; and

"Whereas our shared public assets put money in the public bank account so we can invest in hospitals, roads and schools; and

"Whereas this Liberal government is more interested in helping out wealthy shareholders and investors than they are in the hard-working Ontarians who are building this province; and

"Whereas Ontario is stronger when there is shared prosperity;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"Stop the selling-off of our shared public assets. Keep our public assets in public hands."

I'll sign my name to the petition and send it with Natalie.

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AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I have a petition to the Legislature:

"Whereas the community of Windsor–Essex county has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada resulting in stressful lives and financial inadequacies for many of its residents and businesses; and

"Whereas recently the Ford Motor Company was considering Windsor, Ontario, as a potential site for a new global engine that would create 1,000 new jobs (and as many as 7,000 spinoff jobs) for our community; and

"Whereas partnership with government was critical to secure this investment from Ford; and

"Whereas the inability of Ford and Ontario to come to an agreement for partnership contributed to the loss of this project;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To insist that the Ontario government exhaust all available opportunities to reopen the discussions around the Ford investment in Windsor and to develop a national auto strategy and review current policy meant to attract investment in the auto sector."

I support this petition, affix my signature to it and hand it to page Inaya.

LYME DISEASE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the tick-borne illness known as chronic Lyme disease, which mimics many catastrophic illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, Crohn's, Alzheimer's, arthritic diabetes, depression, chronic fatigue and fibromyalgia, is increasingly endemic in Canada, but the scientifically validated diagnostic tests and treatment choices are currently not available in Ontario, forcing patients to seek these in the USA and Europe;

"Whereas the Canadian Medical Association informed the public, governments and the medical profession in the May 30, 2000, edition of their professional journal that Lyme disease is endemic throughout Canada, particularly in southern Ontario;

"Whereas the Ontario public health system and the Ontario Health Insurance Plan currently do not fund those specific tests that accurately serve the process for establishing a clinical diagnosis, but only recognize testing procedures known in the medical literature to provide false negatives 45% to 95% of the time;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to request the Minister of Health to direct the Ontario public health system and OHIP to include all currently available and scientifically verified tests for acute and chronic Lyme diagnosis, to do everything necessary to create public awareness of Lyme disease in Ontario, and to have internationally developed diagnostic and successful treatment protocols available to patients and physicians."

I agree with this. I will affix my signature and send it to the table with Eileen.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Michael Mantha: This comes from many across my riding, from Hayden to Goulais River and Batchawana. The petition reads:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas we, the customers of Algoma Power, are being charged astronomical costs referred to as 'delivery fees';

"Whereas we, the customers of Algoma Power, would like the 'delivery fees' looked into and regulated so as to protect the consumer from big businesses gouging the consumer;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Stop Algoma Power's influx of fees for delivery and stop the onset of increasing these fees another 40% within four years."

I wholeheartedly agree with this petition and present it to the page Dhairya to bring it down to the Clerks.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Point of order, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The government House leader on a point of order.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I believe you'll find that we have unanimous consent to revert back to motions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The government House leader seeks unanimous consent to revert back to motions. Agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

MOTIONS

CONSIDERATION OF BILL 56

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The government House leader seeks unanimous consent on a motion to put forward regarding Bill 56, the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan Act. Agreed? Agreed.

Government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that the order of the House dated February 26, 2015, referring Bill 56, An Act to require the establishment of the Ontario Retirement

Pension Plan, to the Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly be discharged and the bill be referred instead to the Standing Committee on Social Policy; and

That the Standing Committee on Social Policy shall meet during its regular meeting times on March 23, 24, 30 and 31 for the purpose of public hearings; and

That the Clerk of the Committee, in consultation with the committee Chair, be authorized to arrange the following with regard to Bill 56:

Notice of public hearings be posted on the Ontario parliamentary channel, the committee's website and Canada NewsWire;

That the committee Clerk provide the members of the subcommittee with a list of requests to appear as of 12 noon on Thursday, March 19, 2015; and

That the subcommittee prioritize and return the list of requests to appear by 5 p.m. on Thursday, March 19, 2015; and

That the clerk schedule witnesses from the prioritized lists.

Each witness will receive up to five minutes for their presentation, followed by nine minutes for questions from committee members.

The deadline for written submissions is 6 p.m. on the last day of public hearings.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Are the members of the House familiar with the motion?

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Agreed? Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

MICROBEAD ELIMINATION AND MONITORING ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ÉLIMINATION ET LE CONTRÔLE DES MICROBILLES

Mrs. Lalonde moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 75, An Act with respect to microbeads / Projet de loi 75, Loi concernant les microbilles.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for her presentation.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I'm honoured to rise today to speak to Bill 75, An Act with respect to microbeads, the Microbead Elimination and Monitoring Act.

Before I speak to the bill, I would like to recognize and thank all those who have come to support the issue today. I have here in the House former MPP Phil McNeely, Nancy Goucher and Fe de Leon, who have done a great job supporting and championing this bill.

I also would like to add a special thank you to Christine Eamer and Kyle Reaburn, who have helped me with this bill. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I am passionate about protecting our environment and the well-being of our population, for my constituents, for my family and for the coming generation. As we move forward, it is important that we reduce the impact that we are having on our environment, and this act will help accomplish this goal.

We are blessed here in Canada with 20% of the world's freshwater supply. However, less than half of this water is renewable, and it is our responsibility to do everything we can to sustain it.

En Ontario, plus de 80 % de notre eau potable provient des Grands Lacs. Comme il est observé dans la majorité des provinces et territoires au Canada, la qualité de notre eau est également de moins en moins bonne. Nous devons nous positionner comme chefs de file dans le domaine de la protection de l'eau potable au Canada, et ainsi, donner l'exemple au reste du monde.

Ontario's government is committed to protecting and improving the Great Lakes ecosystem and the quality of the water in the lakes. The bill, therefore, complements initiatives taken by the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change.

Microplastics are an emerging issue in the Great Lakes, and in recent years, even smaller plastic granules which are less than one millimetre in diameter have been found in bodies of water all over the world. Many of these plastic granules have been identified as synthetic plastic microbeads that are added to personal care products; for example, to help exfoliate skin or clean our teeth. After these shampoos, soaps and toothpastes are washed down the drain, they will make their way into our lakes, rivers and oceans simply because they are too small for our drainage system to catch, and they will be staying there. Microbeads are causing growing environmental concern because of the various marine organisms that are ingesting them. The beads are roughly the same size as sediment, plankton or fish eggs, and are easily mistaken as food.

A recent study has even concluded that microbeads can be breathed into gills. This ingestion can cause intestinal blockages, internal abrasion and even acts as a magnet to accumulate a high level of toxic chemicals.

It is clear that this has an impact on the whole food chain, as higher organisms consume microplastics through the fish they eat as prey.

Malgré le nombre d'études qui ont été faites au sujet des microplastiques, nous avons encore un long chemin à faire. Au printemps dernier, le ministère de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique a mené une étude pour recueillir et analyser des échantillons prélevés de l'eau et d'effluents de diverses usines municipales de traitement des eaux usées.

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Le ministère travaille aussi avec l'université Western en leur fournissant des échantillons de sédiments pour les

aider avec leurs investigations de la présence de microplastique dans le lac Ontario et le lac Érie.

In 2012 and 2013, scientific studies from the State University of New York and the 5 Gyres Institute were conducted to record the plastics content of Lake Huron, Lake Erie and Lake Superior. It was found that microplastics are in greater concentrations in Lake Erie than any other body of water on earth. Results such as these, of course, demand action.

The Microbead Elimination and Monitoring Act has two main functions, as the name suggests. The strength of the bill is that it outright prohibits the manufacturing and addition of microbeads to cosmetics, soaps or similar products. Those who contravene this law will be found guilty of an offence and fined up to \$10,000.

The second part of the bill is that it requires the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change to ensure that water supplies from the Great Lakes are analyzed in accordance with the regulations for the presence of microbeads. These results will be published online for the public.

If we were to pass this bill, we would be the first jurisdiction in Canada to have specific legislation tackling the problem of microbeads in our water. We need to take a look to the south and follow the example of Illinois and Ohio, which have passed similar legislation banning the use of microbeads in the manufacturing of personal care products. If we're all to succeed, these states will become our partners in the mission of protecting the Great Lakes.

Though it is easy to point fingers at personal care product manufacturers, it is important to acknowledge that industry leaders have taken the initiative to stop or have made a pledge to stop using microbeads. Some of these cutting-edge companies include the Body Shop, Colgate-Palmolive, L'Oréal, Johnson and Johnson, and Procter and Gamble.

Applause.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Yes, thank you.

Ikea also made a difference by deciding to stop purchasing products containing microplastics and never again including them in any of their offerings.

It is through this kind of pledge that we will see an improvement in the ecosystem of our Great Lakes. We applaud these multinational corporations, which have a global presence, for their commitment to help save the planet.

As public awareness increases, so will the demand for microbead-free products. Informed and responsible consumers will actively search for personal care products that have natural alternatives such as ground hazelnut, oatmeal, sea salt or crushed apricot seeds.

Souignons que la campagne Beat the Microbead est une initiative mondiale mise de l'avant et supportée par 62 organisations non gouvernementales de 31 différents pays. Cette campagne a deux objectifs : informer la population de l'existence des microbilles dans certains produits et en promouvoir l'élimination.

North Sea Foundation and Plastic Soup Foundation, deux organisations néerlandaises, ont créé une

application à télécharger sur les téléphones intelligents. L'application de Beat the Microbead, Warning : Plastics Inside!, permet aux gens de vérifier facilement si un produit contient des microbilles. Il vous suffit de scanner le code barres avec votre cellulaire pour que le produit cosmétique soit analysé et vous pouvez y lire le résultat de l'évaluation indiquant s'il y a présence ou pas de microbilles. Si la classification est rouge, c'est-à-dire que le produit contient des microbilles. La qualification jaune est pour les compagnies qui se sont engagées à remplacer les microbilles, et le vert indique qu'il n'y a aucune microbille.

J'encourage chacun et chacune à télécharger cette application pour commencer à être des consommateurs mieux informés.

This bill has received the support of experts in the field of water quality and environmental protection. Among them are Mark Mattson of Lake Ontario Waterkeeper, Mayor Keith Hobbs of Thunder Bay, the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, and Meredith Brown of Ottawa Riverkeeper. Nancy Goucher of Environmental Defence, who is here today, has led quite a campaign in support of Bill 75. Again, thank you very much for this initiative.

Thanks to advocacy, I'm happy to share that in Ontario, since the introduction of the bill on Monday, our offices have received over 4,000 letters of support to ban microbeads. It is evident to me that the people of Ontario care about the quality of our drinking water and the health of their families. We must do right by our constituents and protect our natural assets. So let's make Bill 75 a reality and put Ontario on the map.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It's my pleasure to speak to Bill 75, the Microbead Elimination and Monitoring Act. I'll be sharing my time with my friends and colleagues from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry and Thornhill.

I would like to start off by saying that eliminating microbeads is something that has been happening for years within the industry. It is unfortunate that the member from Ottawa-Orléans would not know this because she consulted with next to no industry at all. In speaking to the Canadian Cosmetic, Toiletry and Fragrance Association, who represent over 150 companies, I'm sad to say that they were not consulted on this piece of important legislation that will impact their industry. In fact, the companies that they work with have already committed to eliminating microbeads by 2018, with elimination of the products on the shelf by 2019.

I'm pleased to share with you, Speaker, that the PC caucus agrees with the objective and principle of Bill 75, but as we move forward with this bill, I hope we can work together to make it stronger. To my friend from Ottawa-Orléans, I would like to go as far as to offer to set up a meeting with yourself, myself, our friend from the NDP caucus and industry stakeholders so that even before it gets to committee we can make this initiative stronger.

We have to work with stakeholders to make sure all legislation gets it right. We all care about our Great Lakes, we care about the environment and we want what's best for Ontarians, but we cannot put through weak legislation that does nothing to fix the problem.

I have a number of issues. First off, consumer products and the regulation of consumer products is something that should be done federally, for a number of reasons. These products that contain microbeads are often produced for international markets and exported across many boundaries. They are almost never just manufactured for use in Ontario.

There's no mention of how this legislation will deal with counterfeit and non-name brand products coming from offshore and being distributed through discount stores. How will we keep these out? This bill doesn't address that issue. Who will regulate this legislation? The products with microbeads will come through Canada Border Services, which is managed through trade agreements made in Canada. It is not something necessarily the province should be regulating when really the province has no means to regulate it. So unless we're talking about creating an enforcement body, which would cost money and therefore question this particular PMB, then I'm not sure how this bill could actually work.

It has been suggested this action could best be undertaken by the federal government. In late 2014, Canada and Ontario signed an agreement on the Great Lakes water quality and ecosystem health in which each jurisdiction can nominate candidate chemicals for consideration as chemicals of concern under this annex. This is part of what the Ontario-Canada commitment is doing in terms of reducing harmful pollutants to the Great Lakes.

Another concern I have brings me to Bill 66, the Great Lakes Protection Act, introduced just weeks prior to this. Surely, I trust the member from Ottawa-Orléans would have known Bill 66 was coming forth. If it was an important issue, Speaker, why did she not work with her colleague to include this issue in Bill 66? Look, it's quite clear what's happening here: It's a media hit for a newly elected backbench MPP. But the issue of microbeads is so much more than a media hit. I'm truly concerned that this bill is for show rather than tangible results.

Another concern of mine is the way this bill is written and its definitions. It states, "The bill prohibits the manufacture of microbeads and the addition of microbeads to cosmetics, soaps or similar products." The problem is that many of these products are not manufactured here in Ontario but rather shipped from other countries. Therefore, this legislation truly isn't prohibiting anything.

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Another concern is the lack of definitions in the bill. Consider the definition of a cosmetic by the Food and Drug Administration, where the term "cosmetic" means "articles intended to be rubbed, poured, sprinkled, or sprayed on, introduced into, or otherwise applied to the human body or any part thereof for cleansing, beautifying, promoting attractiveness, or altering ... appearance." That being said, if producers want to get around

this, they could, because the terms used in this bill are not clearly defined.

Another concern on definition with regard to microbeads is the specs, defined at one millimetre or smaller. However, when speaking to stakeholders, they're using a definition based on the Illinois model, which is proving to be held as a standard worldwide, where you see microbeads being defined as five millimetres or under. Really, industry is being more progressive than this Liberal bill.

I would like to suggest that we need to work together prior to this bill going to committee and get this thing right, because we know that your government hasn't gotten it right in the past: green energy, gas plants etc. If we can work together, then we can have a good chance at ensuring that the strongest piece of legislation is produced to protect the Great Lakes while also ensuring that industry is on side and has realistic deadlines.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I have to say, first of all and foremost, that we are going to support your bill and we're going to vote for it.

I listened intently to both your words, member from Ottawa-Orléans and also the member from Huron-Bruce. I have to say that although I heard her criticisms and there is a modicum of truth to them, once you take that to heart, still, I want to praise any new member who stands in this place and brings forward their passion—it's not an easy thing to do—and who does the organizing necessary to see a bill here and get stakeholders involved. This is important. This is what changes lives and changes laws. I hope the Minister of the Environment is listening as well, because quite frankly he's the one—and the cabinet are the ones—who should be making this law. And they should make it law.

I want to give a shout-out to someone from our own quarter, and that is Windsor West MP Brian Masse, who has shown incredible leadership on this issue by bringing it forward federally. To go back to the member from Huron-Bruce, of course there is a federal component, and we have to work together with them to give this some teeth.

I want to segue from this to say that it's also educational. This is the first time I have actually been introduced to the topic. I'm not the environment critic, although I—like most Ontarians, I think—care very deeply about the environment and climate change. I want to urge the member, because that's her passion, to bring forward some of the issues that are the passion of folk from my riding as well. It's not just about microbeads; it's also about, for example, environmental assessments for Line 9. If you drive or walk through my riding, you will see a number of signs on front lawns. You won't see any for microbeads, but you will see them for Line 9. "Stop Line 9," they say. This is not a federal issue only, although it is. We can do an environmental assessment here. We're demanding that in Parkdale-High Park.

We're also demanding "NoJets TO." You'll see those signs on the front lawns of my residents. Again, the

provincial government has a role to play in stopping that. Again, that's something we can do an environmental assessment around.

I know that some of my northern members might want to talk about environmental assessments on the rail traffic that's going through their districts, but in my district, the rail traffic that's about to go through is tier 4 diesel trains. Just like microbeads, I have to say that there is no clean diesel. These trains will be running every 15 minutes. There is an article in the Sun today that talks about how two people can take a cab door to door from Pearson to anywhere in Toronto cheaper than they can ride the UP Express—and cleaner, I might add; cleaner, too—because those trains that we're going to subsidize with more and more tax dollars, because they're not going to be filled, that could be modes of transportation, that could have stops and that could transport people, will, in fact, be running through the backyards of people in Liberty Village, York South–Weston, Trinity–Spadina, Davenport and Parkdale–High Park. They will be running through their backyards, through school territories, and they will be destroying the air quality of the communities they run through.

They will not be providing transportation to those communities because they're too expensive. They're not a relief line. And they won't be providing adequate transportation for those who get off at Pearson and just want to get downtown, even for the Pan Am Games, because you can do it cheaper with a cab.

Those are the three issues that are most pertinent, environmentally, to those in downtown Toronto and to my riding. I would just advise the member, with her passion for the environment, please keep on being passionate. I'm looking at the member from Burlington, too—and I'm sad that I missed the all-party cycle breakfast this morning, I couldn't help it, but my heart was there.

Again, there's so much more we could do to get people out of their cars and onto their bikes in downtown Toronto, and we don't do it. There's a portion of that that is a provincial responsibility. You can't just say everything is federal; you can't just say everything is city. We need to do what we can in this chamber.

Suffice to say, I applaud the member for bringing her passion here: Do not be deterred. I can tell you that trying to get legislation through this place is a little like swimming through Jell-O, you know? It's difficult, but you keep swimming, and eventually you get there. I remember the member from Nepean–Carleton once quoted Winston Churchill—I love this quote—and it very much pertains to this place: “If you find yourself going through hell, keep on going,” because my friend, welcome to the Legislature; welcome to tabling your first private member's bill. You will find yourself swimming through Jell-O and going through hell, but keep on going, because it requires all of us in this chamber to keep on keeping on if we're going to make a difference.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: It's certainly a delight for me to speak today on my wonderful colleague from Ottawa–Orléans, a new member. What a delight to have such a wonderful, worthwhile bill, that should be non-partisan, coming forward from a new member. So I would like to congratulate her.

Many Ontarians may be surprised to learn that they're causing harm to fish and wildlife by using personal care products that contain microbeads. Since they are too small to be filtered out by waste water treatment plants, they make their way into the world's waterways and oceans. Recent research has shown them in alarming abundance in Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River sediments.

Microbeads are a serious concern to the environment and human health because they absorb persistent organic pollutants, including carcinogens and hormone disruptors, which, when ingested by fish and other wildlife, can bioaccumulate up the food chain. Organisms that have ingested microplastics experience compromised immune function and higher mortality. Over 250 species have been impacted.

Professor Sherri Mason from the State University of New York conducted the first study that found microbeads floating in the Great Lakes. As one would expect, she found that concentrations increased downstream, with the highest numbers in Lake Ontario.

Last year, McGill University researchers collected sediment from 10 locations along a 320-kilometre stretch of the St. Lawrence River to Quebec City. At some locations, they measured over 1,000 microbeads per litre of sediment, a magnitude that rivals the world's most contaminated ocean sediments. These important findings prove that rivers can act as a sink for this form of pollution.

As with all cross-border multi-source environmental issues, we need to address microbead pollution collectively, as the other members have stated. The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, a coalition of US and Canadian mayors and other local officials, including my hometown of Kingston and the Islands, has been instrumental in raising awareness and calling for action on microbead pollution.

We're taking an important step today. If the act is passed, which I hope it will be, Ontario will join Illinois, the first jurisdiction in the world to ban microbeads. Our purchasing decisions have a strong influence on manufacturers. So regardless of where those products come from, we have the ability to make a difference.

1400

Apps such as Beat the Microbead have made it easier to identify products containing microbeads by simply scanning the bar code. Microbead ingredients are listed as polyethylene or polypropylene.

There are now more than 2,000 products on the market using microbeads in North America. I urge all manufacturers to join the industry leaders like the ones that have already been mentioned and add to those Unilever, Aveda and Lush, who have already phased out their use.

In closing, microbeads are of great concern for the well-being of fish and wildlife, and pose a threat to human health. They are unnecessary and, as we've already heard, natural alternatives are possible to purchase. They must be eliminated as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the members of this House to show leadership in the environmental stewardship of our Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River by supporting this bill.

I will be sharing my time today with my colleague. Merci. Meegwetch. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm pleased to rise to speak on Bill 75, An Act with respect to microbeads. With legislation like this, it's important that we look at it and consider what we're doing before we jump into it. I commend the goal of what we're doing, but again, it's the way it's being done that causes a lot of grief, and not only to the industry. We don't achieve what, really, our goal is.

In this case here, we've seen that there has been no consultation with the industry, even though the industry has been working hard to make changes, as my colleague said before, involving over 100 different businesses. They're taking steps. They're working internationally. I think that if we really want to get benefits, we have to work not only with industry and our stakeholders but internationally, so that we get meaningful change.

It's important if we really want to—especially in the environment. The environment doesn't know borders, and if we want to see change, we have to work collaboratively. The industry has been working with governments around the world to ensure that there's a common approach to the regulatory and legislative approach that they're taking. This is important if you really want to get change.

Bill 75 does not take into account efforts that are currently under way in different jurisdictions; for instance, the Council of State Governments, which includes our neighbouring states and our neighbouring provinces, as well as Ontario. They're taking steps, looking at what needs to be done on a lot of common issues. I had the benefit of joining their conference last summer and seeing some of the good work they're looking at. They're looking at issues, whether it be climate control or legislation that would benefit both countries, and this is just another example. We have to make sure we don't go at it alone.

We look at the record of this government. We look at the failed Green Energy Act. Again, it was a novel idea. I think maybe it was more of an effort in public relations, because it really didn't get any appreciable benefits. Sure, we closed five or so coal plants, but in the world, at the same time, over 1,200 were opened. So if you look at that impact, what did we do? By not talking to our neighbours around the world—a huge negative impact, and we took the hit. All we've done, really, is chase business and manufacturing out of this province and left

ourselves less able to have resources to actually have a meaningful impact on the future.

I know my time is up. I think we need to work with our partners. I think this is a good opportunity. It didn't make it into the Great Lakes Protection Act, which one would have thought it would have, but I think we have to work with the two amendments. We'll be supporting it at second reading.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to speak in this House, especially on Thursdays, when we have private members' bills, because it's a time when people bring things that are close to their heart, the things that they believe would make this province better. I think the member from Ottawa—Orléans has done that, in the spirit of this bill, and she has put forward something that she truly believes in and that our party believes in.

I don't profess to be an expert on microbeads, but I can remember watching TV commercials where it was advertised that some products had microbeads in them and the reason you should have bought them was because they had microbeads. It was something that was better than the other products. I remember I was coming home to my riding from Toronto a few weeks ago, and there was a documentary about them. That's the first time I realized that microbeads were plastic.

Once again, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if you put very small pieces of plastic in products that end up in the water system and in the environment, they're going to stay in the environment.

Is taking them out of products a good idea? Definitely. You always have to look at the positives and negatives and the ramifications of doing A or B. But if you look at the balance of things, I don't think that there are any really bad ramifications of taking them out of the system. They can be replaced. You can replace microbeads with natural material, like corn husks. So it's not that you would be disadvantaging anyone.

Should this bill proceed? Yes. It's a good thing. One of the reasons people put private members' bills forward is not only that they want their bill to proceed, but they are trying to influence the direction of the government. In the case of a private member's bill from the governing side, we're hoping that this truly does influence the direction of the government.

As we all know, on the opposition side, in a majority government, there's not a lot of hope of getting a private member's bill through. It takes a lot of work, perseverance and sometimes many tries. But on the government side, it shouldn't be quite as tough. If the government was truly supportive, it should come forward as part of the government's program. With this bill, hopefully, that is the case—that this is the first iteration brought forward by the member to influence the government to work on this.

There are companies already—as has been mentioned, states in the United States, like Ohio and Illinois, have already moved. So it's not that no one else has moved.

Many of the bigger manufacturers who use these products have already made it very apparent that they are planning on removing them from the system. There are some smaller manufacturers who have never used them.

I don't use any of these products; I'm not going to be an advertisement.

This is a bill and this is an issue where you actually could move very quickly. On the governing side, you don't really have to worry about the machinations of how private members' bills work. If it's a good idea, you can take it.

An example that the government should move on: the tip-out bill of the former member from Beaches–East York, Michael Prue. That was taken as a private member's bill. It should be a government bill and just be done.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, like the side-by-sides.

Mr. John Vanthof: Like the side-by-side legislation. It was a motion to change a regulation by a government member. There have been—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Two.

Mr. John Vanthof: —two bills since.

Interjection.

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes. One was mine, and one was the member from Parry Sound–Muskoka's. That's the type of bill—those bills, along with the regulation—that the government should move. There has been enough identification of that issue. The government should move.
1410

On this bill, the microbead bill, this is the start of the process. Other states have already moved. Everyone else in this House has made really good arguments on the reason they shouldn't be here, because they are bad for the environment; they're bad for animals. There are just not very many good attributes to microbeads, so why don't we just move? We pass this bill, the government takes their cue, and takes them out of the system in Ontario.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Maybe the minister is going to get up and announce that in his speech.

Mr. John Vanthof: It would be a great day to do that. It would be a great day because, unlike other issues—there are some issues that need a lot of consultation because there are big ramifications for both sides. But with this issue, there are replacements for microbeads that are perfectly natural, so there is no reason not to move ahead and ban them tout de suite.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: It's my pleasure to stand in this House today and speak to Bill 75, and to congratulate and thank my colleague the member from Ottawa–Orléans for her leadership. I join, in speaking today, with the members from Kingston and the Islands, Parkdale–High Park, Huron–Bruce, Timiskaming–Cochrane, and Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry. Thank you to all these members for their input and their conversations.

When we are confronted with evidence that clearly shows a product or one of its ingredients is directly harming wildlife or the environment, it is our duty as

legislators to minimize or eliminate the threat and damage it causes. When it comes to our environment and our fish, our human health and our wildlife, these are endeavours that should be non-partisan, and as such I think we should focus on criticizing ideas and not the person. Earlier comments in the House did not follow that line, and I regret them.

I'd like to thank the member from Parkdale–High Park for her encouragement. As new members, that's exactly the kind of leadership we look to across this House and around this House from people who have been here for a while. We look to them as mentors and for encouragement, not for discouragement, because when you're a new member, that's exactly the kind of support that you look to, and that's what Ontarians want. They want us to work together; they want us to work in concert. They want us to be critical in a constructive way of each other, but not in a negative way. So I thank the member for her comments.

Les microbilles sont un des éléments qui posent clairement un danger pour nos lacs et rivières et pour tout ce qui vit à l'intérieur d'eux ou à proximité. On trouve ces petites particules de plastique dans pratiquement toutes les parties du réseau des Grands Lacs et dans de nombreux plans d'eau. Des études ont montré que ces particules sont présentes dans de nombreuses espèces de poissons dans tout l'Ontario, ce qui constitue une menace non seulement pour la santé globale de ces espèces, mais aussi pour la santé de ceux qui se nourrissent d'elles, dont nous faisons partie.

Microbeads can be ingested by fish or other aquatic species, or inhaled through their gills, causing blockages and abrasions. Once deposited internally, these plastics never break down, the long-term effects of which we do not yet know.

My riding of Burlington is situated on Lake Ontario and, as such, it is one that is directly affected by the potential harm of microbeads. Cootes to Escarpment, adjacent to Hamilton harbour, which Burlington borders, contains the largest number of endangered species in Canada. Any threat to the well-being of this ecosystem is one that I know my constituents take very seriously, as do I.

D'autres instances en Amérique du Nord, y compris au Québec et dans certains états du nord des États-Unis, ont déjà déposé ou prévoient de déposer des lois qui interdiraient l'utilisation des microbilles dans des produits cosmétiques. L'Ontario a l'occasion d'être, de nouveau, un chef de file en matière de protection de l'environnement, ce qu'il est régulièrement. Il s'agit d'un rôle auquel nous devrions aspirer en tant que province.

Manufacturers, I'm happy to say, are also committing themselves to protecting the environment, and many are looking at ways to solve the problem of microbeads. Johnson and Johnson is one such manufacturer, voluntarily removing microbeads from their products with the intention of having all of their products microbead-free by 2018. Why do we know this? Because we consulted with them. I have a constituent who works with Johnson

and Johnson. I consulted him, and he I, on this legislation. He shared this information with me, and then I shared it with my colleague the member for Ottawa-Orléans, as part of our consultation with industry. In fact, J&J have already stopped developing new products containing microbeads and have been conducting environmental safety assessments of other alternative ingredients. Their goal is to complete the first phase of reformulations by the end of this year, which represents about half of the products sold that contain microbeads. This, together with the other stakeholders that my colleague mentioned, represents a spirit of collaboration that industry is bringing to the conversation.

Notre gouvernement s'est engagé à protéger l'environnement de l'Ontario et à veiller à ce que la santé et le bien-être des générations futures soient préservés dans toute la mesure du possible. Ce projet de loi offre un outil de réglementation important pour lutter contre l'introduction d'un polluant nuisible dans nos rivières et lacs.

Mr. Speaker, it's been my pleasure to share my time with my colleagues on this important piece of legislation.

J'espère que tous les députés soutiendront ce projet de loi. Je vous remercie, monsieur le Président.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

M^{me} Gila Martow: Je suis vraiment heureuse que je peux parler de ce projet de loi 75 sur l'élimination des microbilles. Comme la membre d'Ottawa-Orléans a expliqué, on a des produits naturels qu'on peut utiliser, comme les abricots écrasés.

I'm very happy to speak on Bill 75, the Microbead Elimination and Monitoring Act, which was presented by the member from Ottawa-Orléans. As she explained, there are natural products that could be implemented, such as crushed apricots.

I think that more could have been done to consult stakeholders. It was explained that some stakeholders were consulted, but others like Unilever weren't.

In terms of moving forward—and obviously, with bills such as this, we're all concerned, and we understand that it's not something where we necessarily have borders. Whenever it's something environmental, that's the challenge. If we try to work on a project at a municipal level, we're told it has to be provincial. If we try to work on a provincial project to have better and cleaner air and water, we're told it should be federal. If we work on federal, we're told it should be international. It is challenging, but I think that we can do better. We can work together.

The member from Huron-Bruce, when she was talking, and being criticized for being partisan—I think it would have been a very simple matter to reach out to the critics from the other parties. If you want to put forward an initiative that is non-partisan, all you have to do is contact them and have a meeting with them. She's very happy to sit down—she's very passionate—and to work together before the bill is even presented. Maybe we can all learn from that, moving forward.

As somebody who has been to Israel many times—I'd like to mention that, here in the Legislature—I think they're renowned for their environmental efforts. I think there's a lot we can learn, not just from elimination of microbeads but in terms of recycling, in terms of clean air and clean water and innovation techniques in farming, using less water.

The Dead Sea is famous for its mud baths and its natural Dead Sea products. I look forward to meeting with some people I know who are involved in importing those products, and finding out what they're doing in terms of the environment and microbead elimination.

It's unnecessary. We've all heard of places—even in Montreal, I believe, there are places where people are doing pedicures using tiny fish that eat the dead skin off the feet.

Interjections.

Mrs. Gila Martow: Right. This is something that's being done all over the world. I don't know how they can keep the water clean. I hope that it's safe for the fish. It seems kind of a little bit—if I can use the word—gross here. It is a little bit creepy. But I think there's something between maybe putting your feet in a bath of fish, and doing something harmful to the environment.

We can do better; we will do better. Thank you very much to everybody for their comments. Take care.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thanks so much, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to wrap up the last few minutes.

I want to tell you how thrilled I am with the new members we have in this House from all parties. I think we've been getting a lot of energy and some bright new ideas, and I think private members' public business is one of the best opportunities to do that.

I also just wanted to address the comments that were raised by others about the importance of building private members' bills into legislation.

I have had five ministries in three years. I can't keep a job. I'm proud that I've worked with many of you. We have five opposition private members' bills that either have gone through the House or are currently part of government bills, fully credited to those people, and many of you know who you are. And there's more. I mean, there have been good things that have gone on. I always say to my friends in opposition, "I'm not the Liberal environment and climate change minister; I'm Ontario's. I'm yours as much as that." But I say that in a serious way, because—

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Interjection: Hey, Glenn, it's yours to discover.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: It is mine to discover, and yours as well, my friend—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order. And I'd ask the minister to speak through the Chair.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I actually like—I think we're privileged to live in a democracy with 107 remarkably committed MPPs. I think we always exceed our expectations as Ontarians when we can actually work

together, and our one chance to do it—to be MPPs before we're Liberals, Conservatives or New Democrats, and be Ontarians first and people on this planet first—is this afternoon. I always enjoy when I'm listening to my colleagues speak to this.

Microbeads are a terrible problem. We know from recent research that there's up to 1.7 million of them—they are pouring out. I want to give a big shout-out to Unilever. We did talk to them. They've eliminated them. They're the first company and we give them a big round of applause. When I was waiting for my EpiPen the other day, I went and took pictures of all the products. Do you know that Unilever is one of the only folks that have completely eliminated them? They're a highly profitable company. The other companies, if you look, still have polyethylene in all of the toothpaste I looked at, almost all of the scrub—

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Yes, sorry. They do. L'Oréal is doing it, but they've done it completely, so Unilever, I can tell you, is not bothered by this. I just think they kind of like the edge that they have over their competition.

I just want to say one thing in closing, in the last minute I have, because plastics and polyethylene aren't just about microbeads. Twenty years ago, we didn't have plastic water bottles. Today they choke our waste streams; they're driving the cost of recycling up.

We have perfectly durable municipal water systems. Do you know that a plastic water bottle, if you take a 500-millilitre glass of water—it uses 2,000 times more energy to drink water out of a plastic bottle—2,000 times. You would have to fill a 500-millilitre plastic water bottle 40% full of oil or fossil fuels—that's how much oil or fossil fuels is there. So we have to work together, but to do these things, to take on those big interests, it's going to take all of us closing ranks together, beyond partisan lines.

So I hope today—my friend from Ottawa—Orléans not only has introduced a good bill, but she has raised the issue of plastics because we have a lot more work to do here. I hope that it can be a multi-partisan effort to ban plastics from our oceans and to start using the good, durable materials and the great municipal water systems we have.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Ottawa—Orléans, you have two minutes for a response.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: First, I would like to say thank you to all the members, the member from Kingston and the Islands, the member for Burlington, and the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. I know two of my colleagues had prepared to speak, the members for Etobicoke—Lakeshore and Etobicoke Centre, who didn't have a chance to speak. I'm apologizing about this. Thank you to members from the opposition—Huron—Bruce, Parkdale—High Park, Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, Timiskaming—Cochrane, and Thornhill—for their valuable, valuable input on this important issue. I want to say thank you very much to the

members of the third party for their insight and their support of my bill. Thank you very much.

I want to conclude by noting that we need to move on the issue and stop plastic pollution in the Great Lakes. This challenge is not for us alone. We want to work with industry, as we consulted with them and I consulted several times with environmental stakeholders, of which we have 4,000 and some change of good feedback from our people at home and in Ontario and everyone in this House.

We can all take action today by having more informed decisions about the products that we buy. I encourage every member of this House to download the microbeads app, which allows you to scan products' bar codes to ensure products do not contain microbeads.

I want to encourage this House to pass this bill so that Ontario can continue to be a world leader on the environment and the climate change issue, something that I know that my constituents and the people of Ontario deeply care about and this government actually cares about.

So I'll end with saying let's beat the beads and pass Bill 75.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much.

VISITORS

Mr. Percy Hatfield: On a point of order, Speaker: If I could, with your indulgence, introduce to the House three senior staff members who have just joined us from the Ontario Arts Council: Kirsten Gunter, the director of communications; Randi Apple, the executive coordinator; and Shoshana Wasser, the communications coordinator.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you very much.

We will take the vote on the last item at the end of regular business.

POET LAUREATE OF ONTARIO ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LE POÈTE OFFICIEL DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Hatfield moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 71, An Act to establish the Poet Laureate of Ontario / Projet de loi 71, Loi visant à créer la charge de poète officiel de l'Ontario.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Sometimes great steps are taken in this House, decisions are made and then, for a variety of reasons, nothing much happens. A committee doesn't meet. A report gets shelved. Priorities change. A Parliament gets prorogued. An election is called. Some mo-

tions and bills never get implemented. This is what happened back in October 2009, when the member for York Centre, Mr. Kwinter, introduced a motion to create the position of an Ontario Poet Laureate.

I didn't know that when I decided to introduce this private member's bill. All I knew was that we didn't have a poet laureate in Ontario. Canada does. Other provinces do: PEI, Saskatchewan, the Yukon.

I was a member of city council in Windsor when we named Marty Gervais as our first poet laureate four years ago. Toronto has one, as does London, Barrie, Brantford, Cobourg, Cobalt, Owen Sound, Kingston, Sudbury—and there are probably other poets laureate in our province as well, Speaker.

Let me try this:

I think it's appropriate this winter
That we're discussing an issue once raised by Monte Kwinter.
He sits in the front bench, unfazed.
He'll turn 84 in the next 10 days.
At times he appears to have the energy of a young stallion.
But he needs nine more years to match the municipal record of Hazel McCallion.

Speaker, the pen is mightier than the sword. Think about it: A hundred years ago, Major John McCrae wrote *In Flanders Fields*. Who among us is not aware of that great poem, written in 1915?

Poetry lives forever. Poetry is everywhere, Speaker. It just needs to be tapped. The doors just need to be opened.

Windsor, the city of roses, has a host of great poets. Windsor is known for many things. We're home to Hiram Walker and Wiser's, where great whiskey is distilled. We're home to the automotive industry. We can't hide from the fact that prevailing winds from America blow air pollution our way, but we have great sunsets because of that.

Let me quote the final seven lines from Anne Baldo's poem *Finally Sweet*:

Windsor is, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder,"
A love swollen by want and distance,
Finally sweet as you recede.
"God save the Big Three" on billboards at the bar.
Salt on the street and wet, grey springs.
Windsor is the city of roses under a whiskey sour sky.

Wow. What imagery, Speaker: "the city of roses under a whiskey sour sky."

We all know that Windsor played a major role in the Underground Railroad. Here's a poem by Mary Ann Mulhern called *Freedom's Rail*:

When her people asked,
"Who will lead us through forests
"Where teeth and bullets tear flesh from bone
"Across a river pulling us into the nets cast for bounty?"

Harriet Tubman answered,
"Like Moses before me,
"I will find a path,
"Lead you north on black winter nights,
"Search for manna in the snow,
"Bring you over on hidden lines
"Running to Canada's sanctuary,
"Where men are not linked with chains,
"Where women wear rings on hands without ropes,
"Where children play in cotton washed clean of blood,
"And the fields you plant
"Yield harvests of promise:
"America's flower opening."

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Mary Ann Mulhern convinced my former ward mate in Windsor, Jo-Anne Gignac, to start the process that led to Marty Gervais becoming our first poet laureate in Windsor. That was four years ago. A year later, Marty brought five other poets laureate—four from Ontario and one from Prince Edward Island—to historic Willistead Manor in old Walkerville for an evening of verse and stories. It was standing room only, and it proved to me that we need to do more to promote literacy, poetry and publishing in Ontario.

My love for poetry probably began in about grade 11, in Newfoundland. We had to memorize the final 15 lines or so of Lord Tennyson's *Ulysses*:

Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Speaker, I think that was written in 1833. It may surprise some of my Liberal friends to know that those lines were often quoted by former Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. That was his favourite poem.

Here is one by Marty Gervais, called *My Son and Samuel Beckett*:

My son put a CCM hockey helmet
Over a bust of Samuel Beckett
On top of the TV
And tells me every once in a while
He doesn't know who this Beckett guy is
And doesn't really want to know.
It's better that way.
The lined face, the quizzical eyes.

He calls him the old man of hockey,
 A kind of silent Don Cherry,
 And thinks maybe
 It brings good luck to the games—his own—
 For just as he runs out the door
 With his hockey bag,
 He reaches for the helmet
 And kind of looks at Beckett's face
 And gives him the thumbs-up.

Black Moss Press published a book of poems by Dorothy Mahoney, back in 2001. Here's one called *Sunday Drives*:

We left early morning or afternoon
 On the ritual drive of Sunday,
 Each holding our secret destinations close,
 Each slumped in our own corner of the car,
 Hoping that the first gas station
 Might see ice cream or chocolate bars,
 That we might run up and down
 The grassy trenches at Fort Malden
 And later eat a pastry swan,
 Wings coated with icing sugar,
 Whipped cream moustaches defining upper lips,
 That we might feed the geese at Jack Miner's
 And find a peacock feather or two.
 If the drive was longer,
 Parents debating between cottage or boat,
 We'd stop and eat at a diner,
 The menu a paradise of choices,
 Though my mother always ordered liver
 And we poured too much ketchup on our fries.
 Then we might stop at Point Pelee,
 Seeking smooth stones and shells,
 Each keeping only one in the pocket
 For the ride home,
 Rubbing the surface with a wish,
 Never remembering what for.

Windsor is also home to Biblioasis, a bookstore and publishing house. Eleven years ago, they published *Straight Razor and Other Poems*, by Salvatore Ala. That's where I found this poem, *Sweeping the Barber Shop Floor*. It was dedicated to his brothers:

They never forget they are brooms,
 Barbers' sons grown into men.
 The advantages of being a broom:
 It teaches you a broom's humility.
 At the end of the day when you sweep the last of the
 hair away,
 You do not feel inferior to those whose hair you take
 out to the trash.

Speaker, I've asked the Ontario Arts Council to name the panel of judges who would select our poet laureate; that takes the politics out of the equation.

As I've mentioned, we've been joined this afternoon by three senior administrative staff at the Arts Council: Kirsten Gunter, Randi Apple and Shoshana Wasser. They're here because they're interested in taking part in this.

I hope this bill is seen as a non-partisan attempt to promote literacy, to focus attention on our amazing poets and to give new focus to the arts community in Ontario. It's not a perfect bill by any means. It can be improved in committee. I ask my colleagues on all sides of the House to support me in this endeavour—that if it does get to committee, that we all work together and try to improve it, because it can be improved.

I guess the bottom line of it is, I believe that we need a poet laureate in Ontario; we should have had one years ago. We have an opportunity now to make it happen. We have the support of the Arts Council; they would pick the first one—and if it was a two-year term, after that, two members of the Arts Council and the outgoing poet laureate would choose the incoming poet laureate.

I'll leave you with a very short poem by Irving Layton:

I dreamt that I was Satan
 Being warmed by molten stones
 And critics who had scorned me
 Had to memorize my poems.

I look forward to the questions and comments, Speaker. Thank you for your time, and thank you to the members of the Ontario Arts Council for coming in this afternoon and taking part in our discussion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: I'm very happy to rise today on behalf of my constituents in Cambridge to speak to private members' bill, Bill 71, An Act to establish the Poet Laureate of Ontario.

Arts and culture have been of utmost importance to our province and to our country for many years. As a past president of Heritage Cambridge, now known as ACO Cambridge—it's the Cambridge branch of the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario—I really do understand the need to preserve and protect culture in this province. At Heritage Cambridge, we work to do just that: to preserve culture in order to enrich my riding of Cambridge.

Bill 71 aims to promote literacy in the arts in Ontario, which is a very noble cause. We must understand that encouraging the public to immerse themselves in the written word contributes to a richer and more inquisitive society. I would say to the member from Windsor—Tecuapseh that his quotes today certainly enriched the debate in this House this afternoon.

Our government certainly understands how important this is. Our government has worked diligently to support and enhance arts and culture in Ontario. In 2007, the Status of Ontario's Artists Act was passed. It indicated a commitment to the recognition of contributions that artists make to Ontario through enhancing our culture,

brightening communities and fostering citizen involvement in arts and culture. This legislation marked a momentous occasion for the province and truly exemplified how dedicated we are as a society to our artists and creative folks. The dedication is long-standing.

Since 2003, the government of Ontario has invested \$6.6 billion in the sector of arts and culture. This investment has shown incredible payoff: the culture sector contributes around \$22 billion to our economy each year, and this number continues to grow annually. Arts and culture also enhance our society in an incalculable way, and we're all better off for this growing area.

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The Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport and the member from Kingston and the Islands have done a wonderful job during this session of promoting arts and culture in our province. I'd like to thank them for their invaluable work in furthering the legacy of this government.

There are many factors of this bill that I support. The commitment to the literary arts is important. It was first presented by the member from York Centre in 2009 when he introduced a similar motion proposing that the Legislative Assembly introduce a poet laureate of Ontario to help promote the arts and literacy.

Bill 71 would introduce a poet laureate of Ontario as an officer of the Legislative Assembly. She or he would write poetry, visit schools, advise the legislative library and generally contribute to literacy and the literary arts in this province.

I do thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for drawing attention to the arts, but there are several important issues with the bill that I want to bring up.

Firstly, the establishment of a poet laureate as an officer of the Legislative Assembly would contradict the typical role of parliamentary officers in Ontario. In general, officers carry out duties that the Legislative Assembly may do, but in a way that is independent of government. There is currently no officer similar to the one proposed by Bill 71.

I also have some concerns about the potential for financial implications in Bill 71. Across Canada, poet laureates often receive stipends for their duties. The federal poet laureate, for example, receives a stipend of \$20,000 per year. The bill states that the costs related to the appointment of the poet laureate of Ontario may be placed upon the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport. Private members' bills may not call for the allocation of funds, so this might be an inappropriate stipulation.

Finally, the Ontario Arts Council has been consulted and has some apprehension with the particulars of Bill 71. The OAC would prefer to see a better system of peer assessment in candidate selection for the poet laureate.

I certainly thank the member from across the aisle for introducing this bill and shedding light on the important role of the literary arts in this province. I, too, look forward to the ongoing conversation on Bill 71.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 71, Poet Laureate of Ontario Act, 2015, put forward by my good friend and the most eloquent member from Windsor–Tecumseh, Percy Hatfield. I also want to welcome the Ontario Arts Council members here today who are in the gallery.

This bill establishes the poet laureate of Ontario. I think we sound like we're all in favour so far, Percy, so it seems very good. As critic for tourism and culture, I'm certainly very pleased to see this come forward again.

The Lieutenant Governor would appoint a poet laureate, responsible for promoting art and literacy, celebrating Ontario and its people, and raising the profile of Ontario poets. The official appointment is done by government or a conferring institution.

They are often expected to compose poems for special events and occasions. I know that some members—I think the former member from Halton would often have his member's statements in poem fashion, so maybe they will look to him, Mr. Ted Chudleigh.

Visiting schools, presenting or arranging poetry readings, and assisting with writing workshops or other activities would be part of the poet laureate's job description, we can say, as well as advising the legislative library regarding the collection of the library and acquisitions that may enrich its cultural holdings, and performing other duties as requested by the Speaker—maybe not the Speaker in the chair at the moment, but the Speaker of the assembly—the Lieutenant Governor, or the legislative library in relation to this act, which is a wonderful resource for us as members. But they would be influential, and I think that's a fabulous idea. They would be a literary ambassador.

Culture is one of the fastest-growing sectors and contributes more than \$22.6 billion annually to Ontario's economy. Having this poet laureate would just add to that.

At the time of the debate in the 39th Parliament when we discussed that, it was certainly supported by all three parties in the Legislature.

Federally, on January 7, 2014, the Speaker of the Senate, the Honourable Noël Kinsella, and the House of Commons Speaker, the Honourable Andrew Scheer, announced the appointment of Michel Pleau as Canada's next Parliamentary Poet Laureate.

We have spoken about municipalities that have poet laureates and provinces that have poet laureates, so I guess it's time for Ontario to have its own poet laureate. I'm pleased to support the member from Windsor–Tecumseh's bill here today.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Nickel Belt.

M^{me} France Gélinas: Speaker, I am so pleased to join the debate started by my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh about bringing a poet laureate to this Legislative Assembly.

When John Rodriguez was mayor of Sudbury, he brought one to the city of Sudbury, and it changed things for the better. Whenever the city was having a special

celebration—the first poet laureate was Roger Nash—he would set the tone.

Well, you saw what it did today, Speaker, when he read a few lines of poetry. It just changes the mood for the better.

We have some incredibly talented people. They can take words and make them say things at four and five different levels all at the same time. They are masters in their craft, in their profession, and I think it's an excellent idea to bring them to Queen's Park and give everybody in Ontario an opportunity to read and hear what they have to say. This is something that is worth doing.

On Monday, I was at the Speaker's Book Award, and I was really pleased to see one of my ex-constituents, who used to live in my riding with his parents, who have moved to Ottawa. Daniel Groleau Landry's *Rêver au réel*, which is a book of poetry, was selected and made it to the final list. I will tell you a little bit about what it is. *Rêver au réel* is a collection of poems that explore four states of being: "Each ponders physical closeness, the emptiness that follows fleeting, fiery moments, and fetuses that continue to spin themselves into constellations, in rhyme and alliteration that reveal the sinuous thoughts of the poet. Landry manipulates sonorities to evoke images that grip our subconscious, that push the magical toward reality. His words blend body and spirit, mingle beauty and madness, and walk the line between dreams and wakefulness, truths and untruths." This is certainly a book I would recommend to all of you if you have a chance to read it.

April is the celebration of National Poetry Month. April is coming next month, Speaker. What a great gift to this Legislative Assembly if we could all agree that, during poetry month, this Legislative Assembly would agree to put into motion whatever steps need to happen so that we select our first poet laureate. I would add a little parenthesis, a favour that I ask of all my colleagues: that when—and I know that we will; I don't know when it will happen, but it will happen—once we decide to have a poet laureate here at Queen's Park, that we make sure we recognize that we have some very good Franco-Ontarian poets as well; and to make sure that through the rotation, there is a system in place so that they, too, have an opportunity to be heard.

Ça me fait extrêmement plaisir d'appuyer le projet de loi. J'espère que tout le monde va se rallier pour avoir un poète lauréat ici à Queen's Park et que, lorsqu'il sera en place, un mécanisme soit mis en place pour s'assurer que des poètes franco-ontariens ont également la chance d'être choisis. C'est une bonne idée. Let's move on with it.

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The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I'm very happy to be able to speak to private member's Bill 71, presented by the member for Windsor–Tecumseh. Before I speak to the bill, I would like to offer that I would be happy to introduce a motion or private member's bill directing that

the member for Windsor–Tecumseh become the official raconteur of the Legislature. I think it would be a very welcome respite for many of us, perhaps, to listen to him read poetry for half an hour or so every Thursday afternoon, or maybe during question period; that might be even better.

Seriously, Mr. Speaker, I do congratulate the member for his proposal. It's unfortunate that the previous attempt from the member for York Centre did not come to fruition. Many assemblies have poets laureate. These are people who are able to speak the stories of their countries, their provinces, their regions or their municipalities, and that adds a great deal. The ability they have to share those stories, especially with young people, and strengthen literacy and strengthen the importance of the written and spoken word, is very important. I think this is an initiative that we should all support, and I look forward to it coming into reality.

I believe that honouring and highlighting the achievements of our artists, and particularly our Ontario poets, is a very important part of our service to the province. Poets are extraordinary components of our literary world. I'm pleased that in 2007 the government of Ontario passed a historic piece of legislation, the Status of Ontario's Artists Act, which committed the government to recognize the fact that artists make significant contributions to Ontario's economy and quality of life. I know that both Minister Coteau and MPP Kiwala are working very hard to celebrate and highlight the profile of artists in Ontario.

The bill proposed by the member for Windsor–Tecumseh will only serve to underscore the government's commitment to the literary arts and to culture more generally. Speaking of literary culture, there is a very vibrant and lively arts community in my own riding of Etobicoke–Lakeshore. There are a number of organizations that promote not only visual arts but the written word and poetry. There's the Arts Etobicoke organization, which has been established since 1973, and it has over 55 member groups, many of which are involved in poetry and the written word. I have the Lakeshore Arts organization in my community, which sponsors literary readings and other cultural events. I also have a very extraordinary school in Etobicoke–Lakeshore, the Etobicoke School of the Arts, which attracts some of the most talented young people from across the city of Toronto in their pursuit of artistic excellence, and many of them are poets. So this is something that in my community would be greatly valued and embraced.

I'm very pleased with the proposal from the member for Windsor–Tecumseh, notwithstanding a few concerns that we have on this side of the House about how the private member's bill has been written: the nature of the office that he's proposing and the financial commitment that he's trying to impose. But those aside, I think it's a very laudable goal and one that I certainly will be supporting.

I'm looking forward to the rest of the debate. I understand that we might have some prose coming later on this afternoon as well, so I look forward to that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm happy to stand and speak on this initiative, Bill 71, to have a poet laureate of our own here in Ontario. As we know, many jurisdictions have a poet laureate. I always admire the member from Windsor—Tecumseh's poetry. As the member from Huron—Bruce mentioned, we'd love to hear what he writes on Valentine's Day, and that he should share it with us every year because we're sure it's something very romantic and beautiful.

I recently attended at the York Entrepreneurship Development Institute, commonly known as YEDI. They had a venture fair at the city of Vaughan's new city hall. It was really great to see so many young people, and some maybe not so young, with their initiatives specifically in the non-profit sector—very innovative.

There was one presentation about a group of actors who do dinner theatre. They do corporate dinner theatre. They're professional actors, and they incorporate people—maybe it's something we can do here for some bonding exercises. They incorporate people to participate in the plays. It's very interactive, and it's wildly successful.

People do want culture in their lives, and they want it to be something that's part of different aspects of their lives; not just something they share within their family but maybe with their colleagues at work, their neighbours and just on the street.

Not too far from Queen's Park, we have a coffee shop called Snakes and Lattes. You can go in there and play board games. They don't charge very much. I hear they have thousands and thousands of board games, including Snakes and Ladders, of course. There's no alcohol there, and it's busy. People like to interact, to have fun. There are other places where people are sharing their music and their poetry.

I want to tell you a little bit about an experience I had when I went to Ireland. We all know there are musical pub crawls. But in Dublin, my husband, my eldest son and I participated in a literary pub crawl. Three actors accompanied us. I have to say that I'm not a big beer drinker, so I wasn't there for the beer. But it was an eclectic group of people who signed up for this. The three actors who accompanied us stayed in their roles. One specifically was Oscar Wilde. They took us through the grounds of Trinity College. They told us stories of their time at Trinity College and their experiences in the neighbourhood.

The highlight of the whole evening was Oscar Wilde; I'm going to call him Oscar Wilde because as far as I was concerned, he was Oscar Wilde. He told us a tale about being invited to bring a little culture to the miners in Colorado. He was invited by a sort of church group, I guess, of women who wanted to get those miners to be a little bit more broad in their culture. Oscar Wilde was having some difficulties back home, something about the son of an aristocrat and some legal issues—I won't get

into that. He decided that maybe he would take this group of women up on their wonderful offer to visit Colorado and bring some culture to the miners.

They have preserved the letters he wrote back home to his friends. One of the letters was about how he got up on a stage in a little community hall. He told his friends back home, "Well, I wore my purple velvet suit. You know the one; it fits me so well. I put my biggest silver buckles on my shoes. I got up in front of the miners, who didn't seem overly impressed with my outfit, and I was feeling a little nervous. They had their arms crossed and their suspenders were bursting and their flannel shirts were bursting at the buttons." The actor was very eloquent in his description; we could all picture it quite clearly. He said that he told his best salon stories and regaled them with all sorts of interesting literary soliloquies, and the miners barely cracked a smile and didn't seem terribly interested.

But as soon as he got off the stage, they swarmed him. He thought, "Well, maybe I did get through to them." No, no. They swarmed him and they took him: "We want to show you our life. We want to show you the mines." They loaded him into a basket and pulled the ropes and lowered him down into the mine. He didn't feel he had a choice. I guess there were no OPP officers in those days to help him out.

He went along. He went down in the mine, and immediately they pulled out bottles of whisky. They passed around the first bottle and then the second bottle. At the end of the evening, as he reports, Oscar Wilde had to put the miners in the basket and load them up the ropes because, as he put it, "You're not going to drink an Irishman under the table."

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It was such a great experience. I think that we want to bring tourists to Toronto, and not just that: We want them to come back again and again. The way to do that isn't just with restaurants, and it isn't with casinos; it's with bringing something meaningful to their lives, something they experience, something outdoors, something unusual, some kind of activity that they can really enjoy across different generations, across different cultures. That's our challenge: how to make Toronto a first-rate city in terms of culture as well as so many other things.

We all have visitors who come from out of town, and I think we all scratch our heads sometimes about what we can do with these visitors that isn't going to cost us a week's salary. It's so nice that we do often have the fairs. I attended the Ashkenaz Festival, and I think it's really well planned. At Harbourfront, I've been to milk festivals. We have Exhibition Place, and we used to have interesting things going on in different areas downtown. We have Luminato and Nuit Blanche. We have so many great things that it's really up to us to help promote and to participate in. That's what we can do as legislators and as members of our own communities and oftentimes as people with large Twitter followings and Facebook followings. When we promote an event, it's very helpful

to the organizers of the event to have us help promote it and bring people out.

So I'm looking forward to not just having a poet laureate here in Ontario—I think it's not just about the poet laureate; it's about what it says about moving forward, what we can do to make this a destination not just where you have to go to the art gallery to see art, but where we can have art that moves around, art that's interactive.

We have long winters; this winter was quite brutal for a lot of people. So what can we do to bring local artists to the community centres, to the city halls, to the schools and, yes, to our seniors? We all know it's not enough just to hire caregivers for our seniors. They want a good quality of life. They don't want to be taken care of by a troupe of babysitters marching in and out. They want to be participating in the arts and in the culture, and I think that there's so much more we can do.

I'm looking forward to hearing from all the creative people, both inside and outside this House, as to what we can do to bring Ontario to be recognized as a place to visit that's fun and educational and has that higher level of culture and history that I know we could achieve.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I thought the member from Thornhill was going to quote one of Oscar Wilde's sayings, "Work is the bane of drinking class," when she was telling that story. I love Oscar Wilde, and I'll end with a quote of his as well.

I want to welcome the Ontario Arts Council and suggest just before—I of course support the member's bill, I think it's a wonderful one, but wouldn't it be nice to also have status-of-the-artist legislation in this place, one of the very first bills I introduced nine years ago? Things like income averaging, things like housing, things like a bill brought forward by the member from Hamilton East–Stoney Creek to protect child actors are all parts of the status-of-the-artist legislation that we would really love to have.

But I want to focus on a group from my riding. They're slightly different kinds of poets. They're called the Toronto Street Writers, formally the Parkdale Street Writers. These are kids, mostly homeless kids, who live rough, as we say downtown, and who have diagnoses, sometimes drug and alcohol issues. I used to be a street kid, so my heart goes out to them. I want to talk about that organization, because it's a wonderful one, and also quote a couple of poems from them.

Here's a piece by Dizia Raposo-Ferreira, Everyone Needs Help in Parkdale:

Parkdale has a heart and it beats heavy with suffering, but the passersby would never take the time to notice. When the sun goes down, it's like being behind curtains: the rich aren't supposed to see the chaos. Every woman and man, even people with no hands, needs help in Parkdale.

Or, Anger, by Nyasha Muntasi:

To be held hostage by one's own mind,
Mind: imprisoned by walls of thoughts.
Thoughts: blackmailed by perceptions.
Perceptions: reinforcing one's identity.
Identity: collected from experiences.
Experiences: esteemed by egos of self.
Self: assured by a collection of ego minds.
But you forget all the above are CHOSEN.
Change but one and the cycle breaks.

Along with passing this bill, I would suggest that the committee that chooses the poet laureate not only choose a poet, but a poet who represents the diversity of our communities across Ontario and, most importantly, a poet who really needs the job because, my goodness, Mr. Speaker, we need jobs in Ontario and certainly in the arts. So find somebody who really needs the money, really needs the job and really represents diversity.

I'll close with another Oscar Wilde quote, inspired by the member from Thornhill. Oscar said, in his inimitable way: "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."

I believe the member from Windsor–Tecumseh is looking at the stars. Let's all do that.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate? The member for Kitchener Centre.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and might I say

That you're doing an excellent job in spite of the daily fray.

My colleague the member for Windsor–Tecumseh, A gentleman who is very orderly,
In his good judgment brought before this House
A private member's bill I hope we will not douse.

The member and I have an unusual connection:
Many years ago for a roommate he made the selection
A fellow broadcaster in Pembroke named Buck,
Who, later and for many years, worked as my CTV cameraman, as would be my luck.
The member moved on to Windsor to an illustrious career as a radio host
Before he decided to seek elected office in this legislative post.

Now he has presented before us a bill
That would create a position of Poet Laureate that he wants us to fill.
In the tradition of Byron, Browning, Shakespeare and Poe
We want to make certain we select a candidate who won't crow.
In this House we explore the richness of the English language every day
And so let us celebrate our expression of wordplay, I say.

Mr. Speaker, culture is one of our fastest-growing sectors

And I think of our language we should be protectors.
Did you know that our culture sector contributes \$22 billion to our economy?

That kind of financial stimulation certainly gives us autonomy.

Of course, our province's broader creative industries support over 300,000 jobs

And I know, when it comes to recognizing culture, that my New Democratic colleague is certainly not a snob.

Our government, in 2007, passed the historic Status of Ontario's Artists Act

That, recognizing artists make a contribution to Ontario, we all backed.

Artists make our communities more livable and vibrant
Like a well of fresh ideas flowing from a hydrant.

I have read the MPP's vision for this position
And know that he's ready to start the auditions.

So, Mr. Speaker, is Bill 71 to be or not to be?

I encourage all legislators on this private member's bill to agree.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's my pleasure to rise as the member for London West to congratulate the member for Windsor-Tecumseh on his private member's bill, An Act to establish the Poet Laureate of Ontario. Like the member for Nickel Belt, I wanted to share with MPPs in the House some of the experience of my community and how having a poet laureate for the city of London has really enriched Londoners. It has challenged us to think bigger than ourselves and it has certainly brought us closer together as a community.

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A poet laureate was first recommended in 2005 for London in the report of the Creative City Task Force, and that task force really identified the importance of a dynamic and thriving cultural sector in supporting economic growth, but also enhancing the livability of our city. Certainly we know that the arts and culture sector does not only generate jobs for arts and culture workers, but it also attracts the kind of young talent that our city is looking for to help foster economic growth across the economy.

Throughout history and across cultures, poetry has played an important role in bringing people together throughout every significant rite of passage, through marriage, birth, love and death. It speaks to both the individual and the universal. In that way, it really connects us much more closely to each other.

London's first poet laureate was Penn Kemp. She served from 2010 to 2012. She's a shining example of how poetry can be used to change the world. She's used her gifts to raise awareness of climate change and en-

vironmental issues; she advocates for peace and social justice. She calls herself a poetry activist; sometimes she calls herself an eco-poet. She uses her gifts and her talents to advance human rights and to make social change.

It's no coincidence that during her tenure as poet laureate, we've seen a number of other things in London really take off. The London Poetry Slam, which is an incredibly stimulating and energizing experience, is particularly appealing to young people. Half the people who attend the poetry slam are under the age of 21. It's really brought our community together. We also have WordsFest, a literary and creative arts festival that was just launched last year. Again, all of this has promoted our sense of identity as Londoners. It's connected us and it's really done great things for our community.

I urge all MPPs to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: I'm honoured that in our riding we have northern Ontario's first poet laureate. She is also from the smallest town that has a poet laureate. Her name is Ann Margetson. She has brought hope and health to our community because poetry has a unique way, in few words, of describing a community that in other ways you can't.

I would like to close this debate by reading one of her poems:

There are many tales and legends about Cobalt Town
Some will make you laugh and others cause a frown.
It is full of history and beauty all mixed together as one.

Why not stop by and stay a while and see what was done.

The silver trail with its shafts and mills now in ruins
lie,

But you can with some imagination feel people go by
Who loved and loved and struggled through much strife

To bring silver out of the earth and give it precious life.

Seams of almost solid ore many feet thick and deep
Now making crevices in which as we walk we can peep

And marvel at the ore that must be still buried there
Or even on the surface maybe or lying open and bare.

Maybe hidden under the wild flowers that grow everywhere

In the many core samples that can be found here and there

But the best part of the trail are the unspoken words
you feel

As you look at the tortured land now really beginning
to heal.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I now recognize the member for Windsor—Tecumseh on the last verse.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Thank you, Speaker. If I could, I would like to thank my colleagues who spoke to this bill: the members from Cambridge, Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, Nickel Belt, Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Thornhill, Parkdale—High Park, Kitchener Centre, London West and Timiskaming—Cochrane. Thank you very much for your support.

All raised very great points. As I said, the bill can be improved in committee. I hope it gets to committee and people work on it and actually improve it.

They brought out that arts and culture is a \$22-billion industry in Ontario. I know one member mentioned a stipend of \$20,000—I think you said \$20,000 versus \$22 billion. But I didn't call for a stipend. I said the minister "may" in the future offer an honorarium. I knew I couldn't say the minister "will." But we should look at that.

The minister, or the member from Nickel Belt—a future minister—said April is poetry month. If we do this in a hurry, we can get it done. We can have a poet laureate in April. That same poet laureate, when we have the Pan/Parapan Games coming up this summer, could take an active role in the opening and closing ceremonies as well, all part of the same ministry.

There are so many things going on. I know the Ontario Arts Council suggested a peer assessment. If they did it under their umbrella, if they brought everybody together, we could have the peer assessment of poets make that decision on the first one and take over eventually.

This is the nuts and bolts of the bill, if you will. It puts it into place. It gets us talking about it. Isn't it fantastic that—well, not an hour—for almost an hour this afternoon, all we talked about in this House was arts and culture, the Ontario Arts Council, the promotion of arts and culture in Ontario? That is a good thing. Sometimes we get lost in our bubble up here when we talk about other matters. But this afternoon, we talked about arts and culture, and that makes it a success in itself.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We'll take the vote on this item at the end of regular business.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Grant Crack: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Ontario Legislative Assembly recognizes that scientists agree that climate change is caused by man-made greenhouse gas emissions and poses a serious threat to Ontario's environment, businesses, communities and economy, that scientists and leaders of G8 countries—including Canada—have recognized the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with a goal of avoiding more than two degrees of warming, and affirm that this House must take necessary action to reduce emissions, transition to a low-carbon economy and combat the effects of climate change.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Crack has moved private members' notice of motion number 41. Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Grant Crack: It's certainly an honour and a pleasure to be able to stand here. I'd like to acknowledge the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, who is here with us this afternoon.

"Science has spoken. There is no ambiguity in the message. Leaders must act. Time is not on our side." That's a quote from Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the United Nations.

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recently launched a report emphasizing that immediate action on climate change is needed to avoid irreparable damage. Thousands of scientists helped develop the report, which is the first since 2007, to bring together all aspects of tackling climate change.

I want to take this opportunity right now for another quote, Mr. Speaker, from a very honourable individual, an environmental expert, Mr. David Suzuki. This is taken from his website:

"The overwhelming majority of scientists who study climate change agree that human activity is responsible for changing the climate. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ... is one of the largest bodies of international scientists ever assembled to study a scientific issue, involving more than 2,500 scientists from more than 130 countries. The IPCC has concluded that most of the warming observed during the past 50 years is attributable to human activities. Its findings have been publicly endorsed by the national academies of science of all G8 nations, as well as those of China, India and Brazil."

Speaker, this is also from David Suzuki's website. He states, "The debate is over about whether or not climate change is real. Irrefutable evidence from around the world—including extreme weather events, record temperatures, retreating glaciers and rising sea levels—all point to the fact that climate change is happening now and at rates much faster than previously thought."

Additionally, I want to read an excerpt from a recent National Geographic edition, which kind of outlines some of the doubt that is being cast on whether or not climate change is real. It's the same edition that talks about the Anti-Evolution League. The deputy House leader has a copy himself. I congratulate him on that, for taking the time to peruse that.

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The Anti-Evolution League is discussed in there. Of course, we all know that they were the force behind the monkey trial, where John T. Scopes was teaching evolution in Tennessee in 1925. Of course, we all know that he was convicted—and we all have different opinions, perhaps, on that.

It also discussed the flat-earthers, who believe that the earth was flat—Columbus actually proved that it wasn't; he was able to go right around the world—and also those who believe that the moon landing was in fact not real.

I want to bring some comments from that particular National Geographic edition:

"Last fall the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which consists of hundreds of scientists operating under the auspices of the United Nations, released its fifth report in the past 25 years. This one repeated louder and clearer than ever the consensus of the world's scientists: The planet's surface temperature has risen by about 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit in the past 130 years, and human actions, including the burning of fossil fuels, are extremely likely to have been the dominant cause of the warming since the mid-20th century. Many people in the United States—a far greater percentage than in other countries—retain doubts about that consensus or believe that climate activists are using the threat of global warming to attack the free market and industrial society generally. Senator James Inhofe of Oklahoma, one of the most powerful Republican voices on environmental matters, has long declared global warming a hoax.

"The idea that hundreds of scientists from all over the world would collaborate on such a vast hoax is laughable—scientists love to debunk one another."

I want to quote the member from Carleton–Mississippi Mills from last November 13. He is quoted in the Renfrew Mercury: "CO₂ is a positive gas. We need CO₂. There is a positive side to that."

The member from Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington also stated, at an all-candidates meeting in June 2014, "I'm very skeptical of climate change.... We have problems today. We can't worry about what may happen in 50 years. We need to address the problems that are now and factual."

Let's talk a little bit more about some facts. From 1900 to 2015, we saw a 1.3-degree Celsius increase in Ontario's average temperature. Scientists are predicting a 7.7% increase by the year 2100. As far as precipitation goes, there has been an 11.8% increase in precipitation in the last 100 years, but they're forecasting 16.7% in the next 100 years.

The points I'm trying to make now are that global warming is real, climate change is real, and we need to be taking action.

Before I go any further, I want to talk about a tweet I received this morning after a press conference that I had the privilege of doing with the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. It says, from the member from Kitchener–Conestoga, "@GrantCrack constituents should be ashamed of him using his PMB slot to play politics instead of advancing important local issue."

That's mind-boggling, Speaker, because my riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell is primarily agricultural, and global warming is going to be affecting our agricultural industry to extents that I don't think most of us comprehend at this point.

The reason I bring this up is because I had the opportunity to speak to one of the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change's scientists. He provided a lot of insight on how the province is going to transform and what's going to be needed as far as adjustments in our

agricultural industry. With a two-degree increase in the temperature, lots of things are going to change agriculturally. I could go on on those particular aspects. We're going to have longer growing seasons. We're going to experience earlier planting. We're going to experience what the Minister of Environment and Climate Change spoke about earlier in the House, how the apple industry was devastated two years ago in 2012: an early thaw, the trees budded, another frost. The impact that that had on the supply of apples and the actual costs in our local grocery stores was quite substantial. That's just one example.

Agriculture—I talked about that. But what about irrigation, Speaker? Irrigation, the watering of our crops, the water required for our livestock: These are all important issues that I think we have to start having a discussion about today. That's why I brought forward this particular private member's bill.

Global warming is causing extreme weather events. I can recall, back in my hometown of Alexandria, in the great riding of Glengarry–Prescott–Russell, in July 2012 a hailstorm damaged both my vehicles extensively. As well, local wheat fields were completely devastated; they were flattened. That's one. We've had record temperatures. That's another reason why I brought this private member's bill forward: because we just experienced the coldest February in the history of the province. There's a reason for that. We're going to be seeing more of these events, whether it's snow in Buffalo, which is just next door; an ice storm in 2013, just before Christmas, right here; or constant flooding. The costs to the province of Ontario and insurance companies—that's going to be quite an impact. So I think it's important that we highlight that today as we debate this motion.

I'm a qualified golf course construction supervisor and superintendent by trade. I'm concerned about the impact on our golf industry. We're going to see an earlier season to golf in the spring and in the fall, but in the middle of summer, we're going to experience longer periods of heat, which are going to affect revenues, because people are not going to go out and golf when those revenues are expected. I know that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is a huge golfer, and I look forward to golfing with him this summer.

Ski hills: They're going to have to be innovative because there are going to be ski hills across this province where in 50 years there's going to be very limited snow, so there are going to be extra costs and demand on water to produce that snow. What about the jobs? They're going to have to diversify as we continue to move forward.

I really congratulate the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change for his passion on making the public more aware of what is going to be happening. I'm concerned for my children and my grandchildren, who are between three and seven. I'm concerned about the impacts that this is going to have on their lives as they move forward. I think it's a responsible thing for us to do, to take action now, take it in a serious and thoughtful

manner as well, and also to take the lead, which we already have on a number of issues that I'm sure the minister is going to talk about, whether it's closing the coal-fired plants that have generated electricity for decades in this province.

As we continue to move forward, I'm concerned about the impact these extreme weather events are going to have on the north, with drier seasons and forest fires. I'm concerned about the Great Lakes. That's why we're putting forward the Great Lakes Protection Act. So we have a number of initiatives here.

I'm proud to stand today. I hope to have the support of all members of this House so that we can come together and work on those initiatives to protect the environment.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to speak today for this motion.

Interjection.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: You're welcome.

There is no doubt that the earth's climate is changing. In Canada, we are already seeing changes in temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns and increases in certain types of hazardous weather, such as heat waves.

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In the Arctic, rising temperatures are thawing permafrost and shrinking the ocean's ice cover. Internationally, the scientific community has accepted that many of these aspects that contribute to climate change have been caused by the buildup of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere. We must acknowledge that human activities are the source of these greenhouse gases, be it through the burning of fossil fuels or the conversion of land once used for forestry and agriculture.

Though carbon dioxide is the main cause of human-induced climate change, it's far too simplistic to suggest that greenhouse gases are solely responsible for climate change. The member from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell fails to acknowledge in this motion natural factors such as changes in volcanic activity, solar output and the earth's orbit around the sun, which can all contribute to the climate change around the world. Climate change is a complex issue, and it's not just one factor that contributes to it.

Climate changes affect us, not just here in Ontario but all across Canada and the globe. The government of Canada agrees that we need sustained action to build a low-carbon economy and make Canada a world leader in clean electricity generation. The federal government has committed to a number of initiatives to do just this, one being working to implement the Copenhagen Accord, the first international agreement to include all major emitting countries, including all the G8 countries, as the motion suggests.

The Copenhagen Accord committed Canada to invest \$400 million for international climate change efforts to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 17% below 2005 levels by 2020. In fact, Canada boasts one of the cleanest electricity systems in the G7 and in the world with 79% of our electricity supply emitting no GHGs.

The real issues with climate change go beyond our partisan politics. It's something that affects everyone around the globe, and I do believe we need to do our part to reduce emissions. I consider protecting our environment an important part of government's responsibilities. But I have to be clear in stating that implementing a carbon tax does not achieve this. We can help our environment without hurting our economy and industry here in Ontario, and there are ways to accomplish this.

To be honest, I have to highlight the cheap political games that were being played earlier today by the Liberal government. Climate change is too important of an issue and we cannot play games with it. It is absolutely shameful this morning that the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change and the MPP from Glengarry–Prescott–Russell held a press conference to try and pose that the PCs wouldn't support this motion. However, that is not the case at all.

The PCs will, in fact, be supporting this motion and we are happy to do it. The minister and Mr. Crack need to stop playing games with important issues. We care about our environment and we want what is best for Ontario, but I want to be abundantly clear, Speaker, that this does not mean we need to implement a carbon tax.

My first suggestion with this government would be to take your time. Take your time, do your homework. I fear this cash-strapped government will rush into a carbon tax to fund their mismanagement of taxpayer dollars.

It doesn't have to be this way, but knowing this government's track record, I don't trust them. Again, I don't trust this government to manage this file. They will quickly implement a devastating tax to Ontarians and hope that the people of Ontario forget about it by 2018.

But you know what, Speaker? People will not forget. They will not forget when they go to the gas pumps and realize that gas prices have increased 7% to 10% per litre. They will not forget when they're getting their dinner for their families and their grocery bills have increased. They will not forget what this government has done when they're paying for their heating and hydro bills at the end of the month.

Under the federal Liberal plan, in 2008 it was estimated that a family using roughly 1,800 litres of heating oil per year would see their costs jump by \$50 per year in the first year of the plan, increasing to \$2,003 in the fourth year.

The introduction of a carbon tax to Ontarians will be devastating. This will be nothing more than a cash grab to fund more Liberal wasteful spending and mismanagement. Ontario families and Ontario businesses cannot afford another tax.

Let me be clear: I am not against cutting greenhouse gases. What I am against is irresponsible taxation. We don't have to raise the cost of everything, shut down certain industries and kill thousands of jobs in the manufacturing sector in order to be good environmental stewards. Industry on its own wants to be a good steward, and they are. In fact, in the last decade, Stats Canada reports that 26% of Canadian industries adopted new

systems or equipment to reduce GHG emissions. Of these industries, 50% indicated that the improvements had a moderate or large impact in that reduction of GHG emissions.

The forest industry is one example where they are directly and indirectly responsible for significant greenhouse gas emissions, from harvesting activities, manufacturing, transportation and product disposal. At the same time, forests, soils, biomass and forest products all have the potential to store carbon for varying degrees of time. Activities aimed at reducing emissions, increasing carbon storage and reducing the reliance on fossil fuels can positively influence the amount of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Industry is doing their part. I spoke just this week to a chemical industry that has reduced their emissions by 20% in the last 15 years, a goal they set entirely on their own. The car industry, as well, is adapting. By 2025, passenger vehicles and light trucks will emit about half as many GHGs as 2008 models. In 2025, vehicles will also consume up to 50% less fuel than 2008 vehicles. GHG emissions from the 2018 heavy-duty vehicle models will be reduced by up to 23%. Again, I stress that industry is already doing their part. They want to help, but reckless policy, like adding a carbon tax, will not help them.

Liberal history shows that we can't believe the Liberal carbon tax will accomplish any objective other than picking everyone's pockets. For example, they brought in a costly health premium tax; however, we see health services being cut across Ontario. They spent \$2 billion on smart meters that didn't result in conserving energy. A Liberal carbon tax will be nothing more than a cash grab, sold as an environmental measure by a government that's desperate for money due to their incompetent management of Ontario's finances.

It is a shame that the members opposite decided this morning to play games with this important issue. The Ontario PC Party cares about the environment and it always has.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention a former Huron county girl and former PC colleague, Elizabeth Witmer, for her work in closing down the first coal-fired plant in Ontario. Years later, the Liberals like to claim this fame; however, it was never truly a priority for them. Now they go on about how they closed the last coal-fired plant, but we cannot pretend that this was a priority—

Interjections.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: It took 11 years, Speaker, to fulfill their promise. It was in 2003 that the Liberals promised—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Stop the clock. It was rolling along nice and smooth, and I'd like to keep it that way. If we could have a little bit of quiet, we'll finish the debate.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The Minister of Transportation. Thank you.

Carry on.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: The Liberals would like to go on about how they closed the last coal-fired plant, but we cannot pretend that this was a priority for them when it took 11 years to fulfill their promise. It was in 2003 that the Liberals promised to close all coal-fired plants in Ontario by 2007. Lo and behold, the Liberals changed their story and re-promised to close them all by 2009, two years overdue. Then they decided to re-promise again and commit them to being closed in 2012, five years overdue. Then, finally in 2014, they closed the last coal plant—seven years after the initial deadline. We see this time and time again, Speaker, and that is why I don't buy how committed the Liberals claim to be to the health of the environment. If this government was truly committed, they would make promises that they could keep and these types of commitments would be priorities. I find it hard to believe how seriously the Liberals are now taking this motion.

Let us remember, last June, during the election, there was no mention of the carbon tax. In fact, the Premier actually ruled it out, and that was only a mere nine months ago. If the Liberals saw this as a main priority and issue, then why did they not run on it in 2014 during the provincial election?

Speaker, my friend from Thornhill would like to speak about this as well, but I need to talk about what we need to do. To address climate change, we need to find a balance. We do not need to sacrifice our economy to protect the environment. We can have both. There's no shortage of solutions to reduce emissions. We need to move towards things such as the reduction of gridlock and ensuring the government stays true to its commitments. There's so much more we can do, and I look forward to discussing it in more detail, and hearing from my friend from Thornhill.

1540

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I just wanted to mention to the House that my father was a meteorologist. People weren't terribly impressed when I told them that my father was a meteorologist, until he came to speak to my class in grade 5. What people really got out of that was that they cannot forecast the weather just for one city. In fact, they can't forecast the weather just for one province or just for one country. You have to either forecast the weather for the entire world or forget it, because it just keeps going on and on.

What he did with my classmates, which was quite impressive to me at the time, of course, was explain about the power of weather and the energy that is held within weather systems. I'll never forget how he explained about warm air and warm fronts meeting cold air and cold fronts. He showed us a really interesting video that was probably filmed in the black-and-white days. It really showed the energy that comes from storms and what creates thunder and what creates lightning.

We all know that the people of Ontario—in fact, everybody in the world, every parent in the world—want

to pass on clean air and clean water to the next generation. We all know that climate change is multi-faceted and mankind has to do its part to reduce its negative impact on our earth and all the creatures. We spoke today about the elimination of microbeads in some personal care products. So we have to do more. We have to work, though, with other jurisdictions. Just like the weather can't be done just in Ontario, climate change can't be addressed just in Ontario.

What I would put to this government is, what are we doing to work with the stakeholders in every other country? It's not enough to close coal plants here if 100 are opened up in China for every one we close here.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I look forward to hearing a lot more on this topic.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Hon. James J. Bradley: What is very clear now is that the overwhelming number of credible scientists in this world believe we have a problem with global warming and climate change. Only a few fringe people—I mean really fringe people in the scientific field—aren't deniers. I thought the March 2015 National Geographic articles dealing with the war on science were very revealing, in the fact that the propagandists for those who don't want to accept the fact that we have a problem with global warming and climate change have been successful in convincing a lot of people that it is not a threat.

I think that most people in Ontario and in Canada recognize that it is. In fact, the government has chosen to have a Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change to place the emphasis on that. Certainly, the new minister is extremely committed to that.

Even those you might expect would not be accepting this—Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey, for instance, would not normally be a person you'd expect to be talking about climate change, except that his state was devastated by some weather conditions that were very detrimental to New Jersey, and he has now accepted the fact that climate change does exist.

The single thing it has done the most, in this regard, to deal with it to this point in time has been the closing of the coal-fired plants. That was fought. There were many people who didn't want to hear about closing those plants: It was going to cause job losses and other great problems out there, and it would be more costly to produce electricity. But I think there's a pretty good consensus. In fact, John Baird, when he was the federal minister, used to extol the virtues of closing coal-fired plants. That was in the province of Ontario, and he gave it as Canada's good record in that regard.

The melting of the ice caps that we see—you see the ice caps in the north and the south, and the alarming state of melting taking place in Greenland and other places—would certainly provoke worry in all of us. The impact on homes and businesses is rather dramatic. We now see more flooding of homes and businesses taking place.

That reminds me, it's why we have conservation authorities that have—or used to have, in many cases—

scientific and environmental people who advise on how to avoid this. It's not good when we see, in some parts of the province, those environmental and scientific people being replaced with political cronies on things such as conservation authorities, because they have to take some strong stands about where people can build in order to ensure there is not a very significant problem arising there.

There are many other people, I think, who want to make a presentation on this, but the last thing I'll mention is insurance. If you wonder why insurance rates are going to go up, insurance rates are going to go up because the insurance companies are looking to say, "It is very difficult to cover this now. We're going to have big losses."

So I think all of us—business, labour, people in a variety of fields, farmers and others—have a concern about this. I compliment the member for bringing forward his resolution.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's a pleasure to rise in this House to discuss this matter. This is a fairly straightforward motion. Effectively, the member is asking us to vote on whether or not we believe the earth is round, and I think there's a general consensus. So, in my mind, it's fairly clear that this motion is being put forward as a way of making Conservatives look bad on climate change. I have to say, they don't really need any help from you; they can do that on their own. I'll leave it at that.

I want to talk briefly about the substantive risk that we're facing, and everyone will raise those issues as they rise.

In 2006, Lord Nicholas Stern presented a report to the British government that they had commissioned. Lord Stern was the former chief economist at the World Bank—no flake—a guy who had actually looked at the numbers, looked at the science. He talked about the necessity of action.

He said this in 2006: "The investment that takes place in the next 10-20 years will have a profound effect on the climate in the second half of this century and in the next. Our actions now and over the coming decades could create risks of major disruption to economic and social activity, on a scale similar to those associated with the great wars and the economic depression of the first half of the 20th century."

We are talking about disruption of human society at that scale. In detail, he was talking about a loss of gross domestic product globally of anywhere from 5% to 20%. And those who have talked to parents or grandparents or who individually went through those events know what that means in human terms. We're dealing with a very high-stakes matter.

Interjection.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I heard the Minister of the Environment there say "bigger." Frankly, there are studies showing more profound upheaval. But let's just say that a former head of economic studies for the World Bank

gave a figure that conservatively puts us in very deep water.

I have no doubt that many in the Liberal leadership know all this and have known this for a long time, have known this since the negotiations in Kyoto in 1997. You have to ask, if you know that a society is facing profound upheaval and you do not do what is necessary to avert those risks, to avert that upheaval, then what is your moral authority in this matter? Has Ontario, has the Liberal government since 2003, undertaken what is necessary to dramatically change the trajectory of emissions in this province? You have to say that that has not been the case.

The Liberals did take action on phasing out the burning of coal to make electricity. All three parties in this Legislature supported the idea of phasing out coal-burning to make electricity, and it was a substantial step. But beyond that, their climate plans have been ineffective, at the margins. If you look at the graph that was in the consultation paper put out by the Ministry of the Environment, you can see that the steep reductions in emissions came in 2008 and 2009, like a cliff. The reduction of coal-burning obviously contributed to a reduction in emissions, but it was the recession—the grinding out, the pulverization, of our industrial base—that made the grand changes. Take a look at the numbers. It was the recession that made the difference, not the Liberal policies.

1550

Frankly, their plans do not take us to the targets for reductions that we have to have by 2020. If we're going to actually make a difference and transform our economy, we can't just say that we made a substantial step. No, there are multiple substantial steps that have to be taken to ensure that you have continuity in employment, continuity in prosperity and continuity in emissions reductions. We don't want to get to a resolution of the climate problem by eliminating employment in Ontario. That's not the choice we have to make. But right now, we don't have plans in place that are independent of that downturn.

If someone is drowning a kilometre from shore and you drag them in 200 metres, they're still in deep water; they're still drowning. Two hundred metres is a substantial step, but it is not enough to solve the problem.

Today, instead of introducing measures that we need to take to actually transform our economy, to transform one of the pillars of our society—our energy system—what we have—and I have to be very direct with the member—is a motion meant to go after the Conservative Party. It's an interesting wedge issue, but frankly, Speaker, that isn't what we need.

This government will make statements about the effectiveness of their policies. I'm going to go back to the comments of the Environmental Commissioner, the 2012 report from the Environmental Commissioner, "Ontario Government Retreats on Climate Change." That was the headline of their media release. He talked about the recent government decisions to roll back programs, to not

complete commitments, and said, "Where are we going? We thought we were moving forward on climate change. This government is retreating on climate change."

In 2013, the title of the study: "Failing Our Future."

"Ontario's Environmental Commissioner, Gord Miller, says the government's long-term energy policy could wipe out some of the gains that have been made in reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions."

He said, "There has been little progress to report this year."

I have to tell you, Speaker, that everyone on those benches who knows about climate change knew about it in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013. They didn't find out this week; they've known for a while. Yet the Environmental Commissioner has been saying regularly that you guys are failing. You're retreating. You're not doing what has to be done.

In 2014, the headline in the media release: "Ontario Failing in Fight Against Climate Change."

Miller said, "It's not going to meet its 2020 target because it has taken very little additional action to implement the climate change action plan it released seven years ago."

We have a resolution talking about how dire the situation is, and we have a litany of reports by our independent officer, the Environmental Commissioner, showing that this government has dragged its feet; gone backwards; failed to act. If you know that someone is going to be harmed and you don't take action to prevent that harm, what is your moral standing?

Speaker, one of the Liberals who spoke earlier mentioned flooding. In that 2014 report from the Environmental Commissioner, he talked about the failure of this government to adapt to climate change—a profound crisis our society is facing that it is fully aware of. It cannot claim ignorance on this subject.

He noted in his report that Ontario's flood plain maps urgently need updating because, frankly, they're old—they're decades old. They aren't getting updated. The insurance industry is worried that smaller towns will not have the political muscle to push back against developers who want to build on flood plains.

Speaker, talk to people who lived through the floods in High River, who had to deal with the mass disruption in their lives, and ask, is the government being responsible if it's not actually putting adaptation in place?

A last commentary from the Environmental Commissioner: "Conservation First needs more work." In talking about the Conservation First program brought forward by the government, this is what the Environmental Commissioner had to say: "The vast majority of local electricity distribution utilities will miss their target for peak reduction. About half are expected to miss their target for reducing overall consumption."

"The government has eliminated all of the interim electricity conservation targets that were used to measure the progress towards meeting its overall goals." So the target that's left is the one—I think it was 2030 or 2032.

This government knows what's happening, could act, has been in a position to act for over a decade and is not

doing what Ontarians need. I look forward to debating substantive legislation. I think if you want to wedge an issue, you can do it with substantive legislation. This motion—really, Speaker, do we need to vote on the earth being round? Seriously?

Anyway, I'll leave it at that—a few moments for my colleague to comment.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: I'll take the few extra minutes.

I want to salute my colleague from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell for his leadership on this issue and thank our Minister of Environment and Climate Change. He's a friend and a long-time committed advocate for some of the issues that are near and dear to my heart, including cycling, as the House will know. This morning, in fact, we had the first meeting of our all-party cycling caucus. It was extremely successful, I think, and very well done. It was the kind of non-partisan co-operation that issues like climate change demand.

There's little doubt that climate change threatens the future of our way of life and economy, our health and our natural environment. There's also little doubt that greenhouse emissions from human activity are already contributing to an increase in extreme weather events, loss of life around the world and dangerously high levels of CO₂ that are already being reached. To delay will be more costly than tackling it now.

Cycling as a contribution to this is a highly efficient transportation form. Indeed, before cars came along, it was already a highly efficient form of transportation. It remains today, in a growing number of cities, a primary mode of transportation, increasing in popularity because of its contribution to lowering greenhouse gas emissions as part of the climate change conversation. Carbon-intensive travel contributes about 24% of emissions in greenhouse gases. It's worth noting that cycling, which our government supported—the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, along with myself, launched a cycling strategy, the first in 20 years, in September 2013. I stood shoulder to shoulder with him then, and I stand shoulder to shoulder with him now.

Of course, cycling is also the simplest choice that individuals can make to reduce their carbon footprint. Very easy to do, it has huge benefits for your health, your wallet. It has great benefits for neighbourhoods. It decreases greenhouse gases from transportation, as I mentioned. Encouraging cycling as a zero-carbon option will make an important contribution to climate change.

I'm very proud on a local basis of my local chamber. Why? Because at the national chamber of commerce meeting, they had a policy resolution that was passed at the Ontario chamber. It went to the national chamber meeting, and it passed. What did it call for? It called for the federal government to enact a climate change adaptation strategy for Canada. This resolution was debated and adopted by delegates from across Ontario and from across the country. It calls on the Canadian government

to develop and implement a national strategy on climate change that is based on scientific and socio-economic research.

So to think that business isn't interested in this conversation—you bet they are. They're worried about it. People in my riding are worried about it. Businesses in my riding are showing leadership at the national level.

I think we can all agree, Speaker. I've enjoyed being part of the debate today, and I really hope that members in this House can see fit to support my colleague's motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Further debate.

Last call for further debate.

1600

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I was hoping for something more hopeful from my friends in the third party. So if the Tories feel they're being picked on, let me start there.

I want to say to the member from Toronto—Danforth that I've always felt that we were sort of spiritual fellow travelers, both very frustrated with the lack of political action by centre and centre-left parties in this country on climate change. I think we can all agree that the right has just abandoned this issue.

But if we want to look at records, let us just wonder why we're looking to the NDP to support this motion today. When the first effort at putting a price on carbon started in Canada, it started in British Columbia, under Gordon Campbell. What party nearly crushed out the first, most important climate change agenda at the provincial level and the first attempt to get a price on carbon? It was the BC New Democrats, who famously led a vicious attack on the government and nearly undermined it. And what happened when that price came on carbon? BC saw its highest per capita GDP growth. So tragic was it that the best environmentalist in BC, the former mayor of Vancouver and the former BC Premier, who was one of the great green activists in the tradition that you and I like to respect, tore up his NDP card over this complete nonsense and left the party.

Second of all, when I was mayor of Winnipeg, Al Duerr and I worked with Jack Layton to try to broker a national climate change strategy. Who was our friend in the west? Gord Campbell. Did Gary Doer take a meeting with us? No. Did Gary Doer support it? No. Now we know why. The former NDP Premier is now the voice of Stephen Harper, attacking the Obama administration and trying to enable the XL pipeline. So maybe we have a few questions for the NDP.

If my party carries baggage because we didn't do enough, in your mind, through the recession, you are going to need a train full of porters to carry the baggage the NDP has.

Yes, this is a serious problem. I loved it when you talked. We just had a briefing from Gord Miller, the Environmental Commissioner, who says that since Premier Wynne has come into this government—he went through the list of all the things that we were doing and said how

remarkably impressed he was with this very reinvigorated commitment to do that. So you can quote two- or three-year-old statements from the Environmental Commissioner.

My friends in the Conservatives: We searched. I tried to find a single, unsolicited statement by any member of the Conservative Party on climate change. Do you know how many there are? None. Zero. The only comments you've made are anti-ones.

My critic is saying, "Just slow down. Don't rush. Don't do this." We've had 20 years of climate negotiations. The last five years have seen the highest GHG emissions. We are one of only about five jurisdictions in the Americas that are below our 1990 levels.

Mr. Speaker, we all went through the recession. If the major driver of the recession was the reductions, why are Quebec, Ontario, BC and California the only ones that are now significantly below 1990 levels? We're the only jurisdiction that had—

Interjection.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Really? That's very patriarchal, my dear friend, coming from you.

It is really, really challenging when you see that we're one of the few jurisdictions who actually will likely see our 1990 target. If you actually read the research, you're completely correct: It was certainly a significant factor and an unwelcome one. But it was also part of the reason other measures were slowed down. You might have noticed that revenues for governments in all these jurisdictions kind of collapsed. Now that we're getting back, we have reinvigorated. We were hoping that this would be a bit of a New Zealand, Norwegian or British commitment to actually elevate this above partisan politics—but clearly we're not. So this government is quite happy to take the other tack.

This is the seventh time I've stood in this House to ask for non-partisan co-operation on this issue—not even any positive response. My favourite is when I met with my critic in the Conservatives, who said, "Well, we really don't know what we're doing. Wait till May 9 and you can talk to our leader." I have waited patiently for Ms. Elliott, for any of my colleagues in the opposition to say the word during the leadership bid. This hasn't even been discussed—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The minister protests a bit too much, I must say. He tries to argue that this is a non-partisan approach to a real problem. I agree, and I think even the Conservatives agree, that there's a real problem when it comes to greenhouse gas and the warming of the planet.

But this is a purely partisan motion. This is a motion that doesn't do a lot. Imagine how worked up our friend the member from Toronto Centre would get if his government actually did something. He would be spinning from the chandeliers. But he wakes up in the House and he gets all excited on a motion that's essentially crafted in order to play politics with this issue, to try to make this out to be an issue of left versus right.

I've just got to say, most people don't buy that. A lot of issues have nothing to do with left and right; they have to do with right and wrong. When you see Liberals playing with issues like this for crass political reasons, I say that's wrong.

Now, I disagree with my Conservative friends a lot of times, and I'm sure they disagree with me, but we're all in this House trying to do the same thing. I would only say this—unfortunately, I don't have enough time so I might not get to say it—I really find it a little bit difficult to take, because I've been watching the Liberal government over the past number of years and they're out-flanking the Tories on the right. I'm really sad that the Liberals have become such a right-wing, righteous party—

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

I now turn to the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. You have two minutes.

Mr. Grant Crack: I'd like to thank the member from Huron—Bruce, the member from Thornhill, the deputy government House leader, the passionate remarks from the member from Toronto—Danforth, the member from Burlington, the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, and the member from Timmins—James Bay.

I was kind of surprised to hear some of the comments from both parties as far as this being a political issue, playing politics, that type of thing, because I know there are no politics played in this chamber; there never has been and there never will be—

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Dufferin—Caledon, come to order.

Mr. Grant Crack: —according to them.

This is a very serious issue to me. I'm quite passionate about it. I brought this forward because I feel strongly about leaving a planet, a stronger Ontario, a healthier Ontario to my grandchildren and to the grandchildren of children of all the members here.

I'm worried. It was put forward because I would like to see our government introduce more measures to deal with climate change in the future. I'm going to be supportive of that. I'm going to be with the minister as often as I can to support him in his endeavours in protecting the environment and helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across this province.

We have to start somewhere. The debate today is exactly what I wanted out of this particular motion. It's got everybody talking, for different reasons, perhaps, but the goal was to bring a very important issue to the forefront. Let's talk about it more. I know they want to talk about one issue. They've talked about that issue for four straight weeks, Speaker. I hope over the March break that they can change the tune. It's going to be warmer at the end of March when we return. Let's start talking about climate change.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

MICROBEAD ELIMINATION AND MONITORING ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ÉLIMINATION ET LE CONTRÔLE DES MICROBILLES

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): We will deal first with ballot item number 34, standing in the name of Madame Lalonde.

Madame Lalonde has moved second reading of Bill 75, An Act with respect to microbeads.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), this bill is being referred to—Madame Lalonde?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I would like to refer my bill to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member has requested that the bill be sent to finance and economic affairs. Agreed? Agreed.

POET LAUREATE OF ONTARIO ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LE POÈTE OFFICIEL DE L'ONTARIO

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Hatfield has moved second reading of Bill 71, An Act to establish the Poet Laureate of Ontario.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Pursuant to standing order 98(j), the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Speaker, I would refer the bill to the committee on regulations and private bills.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member requests that it be sent to the committee on private bills and regulations. Agreed? Agreed.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Mr. Crack has moved private member's notice of motion

number 41. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion will please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion will please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Order.

Call in the members. This is a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1611 to 1616.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Would members please take their seats.

All those in favour, please rise and remain standing.

Ayes

Albanese, Laura	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMeekin, Ted
Anderson, Granville	Forster, Cindy	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Arnott, Ted	French, Jennifer K.	Moridi, Reza
Baker, Yvan	Gravelle, Michael	Murray, Glen R.
Ballard, Chris	Hatfield, Percy	Oraziotti, David
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoggarth, Ann	Pettapiece, Randy
Bisson, Gilles	Hoskins, Eric	Potts, Arthur
Bradley, James J.	Hunter, Mitzie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Chan, Michael	Jaczek, Helena	Rinaldi, Lou
Colle, Mike	Jones, Sylvia	Scott, Laurie
Coteau, Michael	Lalonde, Marie-France	Sergio, Mario
Crack, Grant	MacCharles, Tracy	Tabuns, Peter
Damerla, Dipika	Malhi, Harinder	Taylor, Monique
Del Duca, Steven	Mangat, Amrit	Thompson, Lisa M.
Delaney, Bob	Martins, Cristina	Vanthof, John
Dhillon, Vic	Marlow, Gila	Vernile, Daiene
Dickson, Joe	Matthews, Deborah	Wong, Soo
Doug, Han	McGarry, Kathryn	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Duguid, Brad	McMahon, Eleanor	

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): All those opposed, please stand and remain standing.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller): The ayes are 56; the nays are 0.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): I declare the motion carried.

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): Orders of the day.

Hon. James J. Bradley: Mr. Speaker, much as I do not want to—I would like to go on with a bill—I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The deputy government House leader has moved adjournment of the House. Agreed?

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed?

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Let me take this opportunity to wish you a happy March break. We'll see you back on March 23 at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1620.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lieutenant Governor / Lieutenant-gouverneure: Hon. / L'hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, OC, OOnt.

Speaker / Président: Hon. / L'hon. Dave Levac

Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Balkissoon, Bas (LIB)	Scarborough–Rouge River	Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée Deputy Speaker / Vice-président
Ballard, Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, Hon. / L'hon. James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Chair of Cabinet / Président du Conseil des ministres Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade / Ministre des Affaires civiles, de l'Immigration et du Commerce international
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport Minister Responsible for the 2015 Pan and Parapan American Games / Ministre responsable des Jeux panaméricains et parapanaméricains de 2015
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cookville	Associate Minister of Health and Long-Term Care (Long-Term Care and Wellness) / Ministre associée de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée (Soins de longue durée et Promotion du mieux-être) Minister Without Portfolio / Ministre sans portefeuille Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure / Ministre du Développement économique, de l'Emploi et de l'Infrastructure
Dunlop, Garfield (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	
Elliott, Christine (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	

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Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
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Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
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Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
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Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	
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Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
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Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron-Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming-Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
Walker, Bill (PC)	Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound	
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Gila Martow, Kathryn McGarry
Peter Tabuns
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Han Dong, Randy Hillier
Marie-France Lalonde, Harinder Malhi
Kathryn McGarry, Eleanor McMahon
Taras Natyshak, Peggy Sattler
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Government
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First Session, 41st Parliament

**Assemblée législative
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Première session, 41^e législature

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(Hansard)**

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des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 23 March 2015

Lundi 23 mars 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Greffière
Deborah Deller

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Monday 23 March 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 23 mars 2015

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Please join me in a moment of silence for inner thought and personal reflection.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael Coteau: It's my pleasure today to welcome Tanisha Martinez, who is joining us here today at the Legislature. There she is. She is one of our first torchbearers selected here in the province of Ontario. She was selected because of her bravery. She actually helped save the life of a man who was under some trauma back in 2013; she provided assistance. It's a pleasure to have her here and a pleasure to have her participate as a torchbearer in the Pan Am/Parapan Am Games.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: We have some new pages today. The very first page captain is Marin Papulkas, and her father has joined us today. Please welcome Thomas Papulkas to Queen's Park.

Hon. Brad Duguid: I'm delighted to introduce Sam Salloum, father of Chris Salloum, my outstanding legislative assistant. He's here from Edmonton, Alberta. Welcome.

Mr. John Vanthof: Our page captain today is Jessie Meanwell. I'd like to introduce Jessie's mother, Frances Cockburn; Jessie's father, Charles Meanwell; and Jessie's aunt, Lynn Cockburn. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Mr. Speaker, please join me in welcoming Mr. Saadettin Ozcan, president of the Anatolian Heritage Federation; Mr. Ahmet Tamirci, vice-president of the Anatolian Heritage Federation; as well as Mr. Mehmet Durmus, the CEO of the Turkish Canadian Chamber of Commerce. The federation is having their annual event here at the committee room. Please welcome them.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to introduce Mr. Ric Randmaa, father of page captain Luc Randmaa. He is in our public gallery.

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I'd like to welcome Mr. Robin Singh, who is joining us in the public gallery today. He is the father of page Japneet Kaur.

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to welcome, from Ottawa South, page Joe Fast.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions?

On a point of order, the member from Nepean–Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I wanted to bring to the attention of the House the crushing defeat of the Toronto Maple Leafs at the hands of my Ottawa Senators this past Saturday in what is known annually as the battle of Ontario. I wanted all members, particularly those from Toronto, to hear about that crushing defeat on Saturday night.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. I'd like to thank the member for Nepean–Carleton for starting the heckling before question period.

It is now time for question period.

ORAL QUESTIONS

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Jim Wilson: Speaker, my question is for the Premier. On March 9, the public became aware of the RCMP investigation into senior officials of the Ontario Provincial Police Association. A mere six days later, Commissioner Hawkes announced the officers under investigation were suspended.

On December 15, the public learned of the alleged bribery in the Sudbury by-election, and here we are, 92 days later, and you, Premier, have yet to hold anyone to account. Premier, will today be the day you show some integrity and ask for Pat Sorbara's resignation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, welcome back. As I was saying, the situations are very different. I think the interim leader of the opposition knows that. The investigation into the OPPA arose out of an internal complaint and investigation within their organization. The Sudbury investigation arose out of allegations from the opposition.

I can't comment on the OPPA's internal review, Mr. Speaker, the facts which led to their decision. The fact is that there is an investigation going on in the Sudbury situation. That investigation is happening outside of this Legislature, and we're going to let it unfold as it should, outside the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Premier: With the OPP officers under investigation suspended from duty and fired or removed from their positions, they are, Premier, physically removed from the OPPA offices which are the focus of the investigation. This action removes any doubt as to the integrity of the investigation.

Premier, for three months you have allowed your deputy chief of staff access to every shred of evidence

pertaining to the Sudbury by-election and the OPP's bribery investigation. Why won't you hold yourself to the same standard of integrity as the OPP commissioner?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, as I've said, I can't comment on the OPPA's internal review of the facts that led to their decision. But what I can say is they are very different situations. The one was an internal complaint within the organization. The situation in Sudbury is an allegation by an opposition party.

The fact is, there is an investigation going on. I've been very clear about my actions. I made a public statement. I've answered questions repeatedly. There is an investigation going on. We will work with the authorities, but we'll work with the authorities outside of this House, which is where the investigation is taking place.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: The commissioner of the OPP and the board of the OPPA have done the right thing. They've made the decision to remove the officers, seal the evidence and allow the RCMP to have an arm's-length proper investigation. They've restored some integrity back into their system and into our system of justice. They've not acted as their own judge or jury. They've not acted above the law. They simply did the right thing while the investigation unfolds.

It's a standard that Ontarians have a right to expect of you and the office you hold: to do the right thing, the honourable thing. Premier, what is it going to take for you to hold anyone in your office to account for the actions they have done?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As I've said in this House many times, I take this situation very seriously. The investigation is independent of government. The only statement that has been made by an organization, Elections Ontario—I've said this many times; I've quoted this many times in the House, but I will do it again, Mr. Speaker. The Chief Electoral Officer clearly stated, and I'm quoting: "I'm neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges."

Those decisions will not be made in this House, Mr. Speaker. Those decisions will be made as a result of the investigation and whatever process thereafter, and that's all happening outside of this Legislature.

HOUSING SERVICES CORP.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: My question is to the Premier. When you were Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, you would have received the social Housing Services Corp.'s 2010 financial statement. The HSC makes their money by marking up the cost of natural gas and insurance for housing providers. They are supposed to be part of helping the most vulnerable people in our society. The financial statement showed that HSC had invested Ontario social housing dollars in a company called HS 497 Ltd. Can you tell me who HS 497 Ltd. is and where they are located?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, I just want to be very clear: I share the honourable member's concern about expenditures. Where we differ, I suppose, is how you respond to that. It was the honourable member's government that put in place the Housing Services Corp. without the accountability mechanisms necessary. We, of course, in government, changed that and, as a result of that, were able to spot some difficulties and respond to them.

In terms of that—the specifics—the Housing Services board has agreed to operate under the expense regime of cabinet and Treasury Board. They've also asked us to work with them to bring in a third party to evaluate.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Back to the Premier, Mr. Speaker: I'm not surprised that the minister was unable to answer, because it was during the time that you were Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. I just want to say that we found out through documents that are available—and I think you should have read that report—that HS 497 Ltd. is not even in this country. Under your watch, the HSC invested Ontario affordable housing dollars in a company located in Manchester, England. There's no evidence that Ontario got a single dollar back, and HS 497 has been dissolved.

Premier, this isn't the only questionable deal. HSC loaned over a million dollars to Innoserv Solar. Most of the loans were written off as uncollectible in the same year they were given. Innoserv is now dissolved, too, so another million dollars of affordable housing money is gone. Your review isn't even looking for this money. Will you ask the auditor to review this?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Mr. Speaker, I think the honourable member's comments support what I'm saying: There are some changes that are happening at the Housing Services Corp.

Let me just say this: One of my favourite philosophers—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Who's going to jail?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. That'll do.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You have friends?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That'll do.

Start the clock.

Minister?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Most of my friends would agree with this philosopher who said that the needs of the many must supersede the needs of the few or the needs of the one.

This corporation was set up—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Just continuing—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton will come to order.

Carry on.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: The concept of pooling efforts—which was one thing the party opposite, when they were in government, got right—is something that we continue to maintain so that the benefits can accrue to all municipalities, including small municipalities like the one the honourable member is from.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: Back to the Premier: Premier, your so-called accountability measures aren't working. In 2013, Housing Services Corp. advanced \$125,000 to a for-profit company that they formed with yet another British organization. Since then, the HSC CEO has spent thousands and thousands of affordable housing dollars travelling across Canada—and to Europe—pedalling that for-profit company.

There is a pattern of affordable housing dollars being funnelled into for-profit companies. It's Ornge 2.0. Premier, can you explain to the 165,000 families waiting for affordable housing how this is helping them? If not, will you call the auditor today to investigate?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: As I stated earlier, I thought quite clearly, there is a third-party independent review of the entire operation of the Housing Services Corp., and the operations of all their subsidiaries. That's a prudent step and it's one that the Housing Services Corp., which is an independent, non-profit corporation separate from government, requested us to help—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: —and we are delighted to do so. We'll be proceeding with that review, and that review will guide us on any further steps that may need to be taken.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Mr. Taras Natyshak: My question is to the Premier. Speaker, the Premier is slashing services because Liberal scandal and incompetence has left the Premier scrambling to pay the bills. Does the Premier think the way to pay for Liberal waste is to close child care centres, slash half a billion out of education and close neighbourhood schools all across our province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I'm going to assume that this is the beginning of the NDP's attack on a budget that they have not read, that they have not seen yet, the assumptions underlying which they ran on.

The fact is we are investing in people—we have been doing that; we will continue to do that—investing in their talent and skills. We are investing in infrastructure, and by that I mean the roads and bridges across this province; I mean the transit that is needed. We are making those investments in order to allow our economy to continue to recover and to thrive.

We are setting up a retirement security plan that is going to allow people in this province to be more secure in their retirement. We are creating a dynamic business climate that allows private business to do what they do

best, and that is create the jobs that we know we need in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Does the Premier think that the best way to keep funding Liberal waste and scandals is for the Liberal government to fire nurses in Sudbury, Timmins, Quinte, Leamington or Sault Ste. Marie?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Since that's not what we're doing, I would challenge the premise of the question because we continue to make investments in those very services that are needed in all of those communities. We're going to do that with a budget that is based on an elimination of the deficit by 2017-18.

This fantasy or this myth that the NDP wants to propagate that somehow we are not making those investments and somehow we are not supporting the services that people need is just not the case. That is the plan we brought in in our last budget. That's the plan that we are executing and that is the plan that we will continue to implement when we bring our budget forward this spring.

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The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: That's exactly what we're afraid of: the last budget being repeated. Ontarians have seen first-hand that privatizing hydro generation and de-regulation in the late 1990s and early 2000s has shot our bills through the roof, and even Liberals said that privatizing the 407 was a complete disaster.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Economic Development, come to order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Now the Premier is planning to privatize even more hydro assets that Ontarians own. Does the Premier really believe that a fire sale today is the solution to a problem created by a fire sale 15 years ago and compounded by 10 years of Liberal incompetence?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I just want to be clear because this is a very important gambit and it's going to come up over and over and over again. Let me be clear: I have said and we have said clearly that we are going to invest in transit and transportation infrastructure across this province. That is a commitment and we are going to remain true to that.

Having said that, we ran on a plan that would review the assets that are owned by the people of Ontario. We ran on that plan, Mr. Speaker, and they ran on that plan. They ran on the same assumptions that we ran on. That was part of their platform. We are doing that review.

Now the third party has said, "We don't think there should be any change in the LCBO or in the Beer Store. We don't think there should be any change in Hydro One." Basically what they're saying is, "We don't think you should invest in transit because we don't think anything should ever change." Well, that's not our position.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

New question.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Back to the Premier: Last year, right around this time, the Premier was insisting that she had introduced the most progressive budget since the dawn of time, but a year later—

Applause.

Mr. Taras Natyshak:—curb your enthusiasm—schools are being cut, nurses are being fired, child care centres are being closed and the Liberals are beating the drum of privatization. All the while, she's opening new loopholes for the wealthiest corporations in the province while everyone else picks up the tab for more than a decade of Liberal waste and corruption.

Premier, can we expect a rerun of last year with claims of a progressive budget while we experience what Bloomberg called the “biggest ... cuts since Harris”?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There are 24,000 more nurses practising in Ontario than there were when we came into office. On top of that, let me just say that the plan that makes sense, that this member ran on in the election, was—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I would caution the member to not hold anything up. Thank you.

Carry on.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: That is just the document that the third party ran on, and they ran on it using exactly the same financial and fiscal assumptions that we made, except that they said they were going to find \$600 million more.

They said, on page 2, “We will balance Ontario's books by 2017-18 with significantly more fiscal space than the Liberal plan.” That was their plan: to find \$600 million more, in addition to everything that we were doing, including reviewing assets.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: The Premier can claim that she has another progressive plan, but here are the facts: education—half a billion in cuts; health care—nurses being fired across the province; child care—18 centres facing cuts and parents losing child care spaces; public services—fire sale.

Who's getting help? The wealthiest companies in Ontario are getting brand new HST handouts while families have to deal with cut after cut, all because of more than a decade of Liberal waste and corruption and scandal. Can we expect more of the same in this budget?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What you can expect is exactly that we will continue to invest in health care, that we will continue to invest in education. In fact, those budgets are going up this year; they're not going down.

The member opposite simply will have to read the budget when it comes out and understand that the investments that we are making in home care, in our children's education and in our young people's job opportunities—those are the things that will set us up for the future, including the investments in transit and transportation infrastructure that they apparently do not think that we should be making. All of that will be part of our budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Ontario can't cut its way to prosperity, but instead of laying the groundwork for growth, the Premier is cutting education. She's firing nurses and she's cutting child care so moms and dads can't afford to go to work. She's even planning to privatize hydro assets that Mike Harris and Ernie Eves took off the chopping block. The Premier is spinning—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Education, come to order.

Mr. Taras Natyshak:—from the left, governing from the right and—

Hon. Liz Sandals: You have a really weird definition of cut.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. As I was asking her to come to order, she continued speaking. The Minister of Education, come to order.

Finish your question, please.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Premier, you're spinning from the left, governing from the right and destroying the middle class.

Will this budget mean more cuts, more corporate giveaways and more Liberal corruption? Or will the Premier commit to stopping her cuts and finally putting people first?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Our plan is about putting people first. It's about making the investments that people need. It's about making investments in transit that will help people get home to their kids and get to work in better time.

Our plan is about making the investments in roads and bridges in counties and municipalities around this province that are needed by those municipalities in order to draw business. Our plan is about making sure that young people have the opportunity to have work experience so that they can get into the jobs that are going to allow them to have that lifestyle in the future, that will allow them to look after their families. That's what our plan is about and that is, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the plan that we ran on. It's the budget that we introduced last year and this year's—

Hon. Charles Sousa: Twice.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Twice—we introduced last year's budget twice. This year's budget will be an exact extension of that plan.

DRIVER LICENCES

Mr. Michael Harris: I've got a question to the Minister of Transportation. Minister, how long does it take your ministry to review and respond to a medical suspension of a driver's licence?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I do thank the member from Kitchener—Conestoga for that question. I'm delighted to hear a question coming from a member on that side of the House on an issue that I know is important not only to that member but, of course, to many members. This is

something that comes up from time to time in many constituency offices, including my own.

That member would have heard me say on multiple occasions—I say it all the time—that road and highway safety is perhaps my most important responsibility as Minister of Transportation. In responses or answers to media last week, I talked a lot about that when this kind of question came up.

What I know is that our Ministry of Transportation is currently meeting or exceeding our public service guarantee with respect to evaluating medical data related to driver's licence suspensions in a responsible amount of time so that drivers are back on the road as soon as possible while ensuring that ultimately our roads remain safe.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Minister, for you to say your ministry is exceeding the guarantees for MTO medical evaluations confirms you have absolutely no idea what's going on in your own ministry.

You tell us that you will review cases and take action within 30 business days. The truth is, for many, it's taking double that time or more. Every MPP here can tell you about the frustrated motorists putting lives and livelihoods on hold while awaiting medical review. It's great that substitute teacher David Wallace got his licence back after going to Global News last week, but what about the tens of thousands of others still waiting? Do they all have to go on Focus Ontario to get you to act?

Minister, Mr. Wallace finally has his licence—

Applause.

Mr. Michael Harris: Thank you for that—thousands are waiting for an answer. Will you commit to hard deadlines today and fix this broken system?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: The member opposite knows this is a very important question and something the Ministry of Transportation takes very, very seriously. He mentioned in his second question that we do have a 30-business-day window, which we work hard to respond to. What the member didn't say—and he knows full well that I can't respond to specific anecdotal circumstances or cases that he may bring forward here in the Legislature. But it's important for us to recognize that from time to time there's a requirement for additional documentation, for additional information from doctors to make sure that we get it right.

There are literally thousands and thousands of individuals who have to go through this process on an annual basis, and I'm pretty sure that member and people living in his community wouldn't want the Ministry of Transportation to get it wrong because I know they share our desire to make sure that our roads and highways remain as safe as they are.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. It's been three and a half months since both Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed were caught on tape offering what the

OPP and Elections Ontario have called a bribe to Andrew Olivier to get him not to—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

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Mr. Gilles Bisson: You finally, after a month of stalling, decided that you'd finally found time to meet with the Ontario Provincial Police, and that time is a month from now. I'm not so sure anybody else in Ontario would be able to say, "Hold off, OPP," for two months, but you get the chance to do that.

My question is this: What has the Premier done to make sure to turn over all of the emails and documents to the OPP as part of this investigation? Have you given them all your emails and all your correspondence dealing with the Olivier situation?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I'm going to repeat what I said last week about the timing of the interview. I will also repeat what I've said in this House many times, which is that the entire investigation is taking place outside of the Legislature, not in this Legislature.

The timing of my interview has been determined by the OPP and my legal counsel, Mr. Speaker. They have been working to find a mutually convenient date. They have also agreed that because there's an ongoing investigation, the dates and times of interviews will not be made public. This is a normal protocol in the context of an ongoing investigation. The OPP and my counsel have agreed on a date for my interview, to be conducted before the end of April.

As I've said, my office and I will continue to cooperate fully with the OPP in that investigation that's taking place outside of this House.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My supplementary is back to the Premier. What is not ordinary is that if somebody comes and knocks at the door of any citizen in this province, and the OPP says, "I want to meet with you as part of an investigation to a crime," guess what? You don't get to put it off for a month. You don't get to say it's going to happen next month. You do it right away. But this Premier has decided, for some reason or other, that she should be treated differently.

We saw what happened to the OPPA. Those particular officers, when they became the subject of an investigation, themselves decided to step aside. Why is it that you, as the Premier, feel that you're so above the law that you can push off, for two months, meeting with the OPP, and somebody who broke the law is able to keep their jobs, by the name of Mr. Lougheed and Mrs. Sorbara?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth in terms of my cooperation with the OPP. I've been very clear that we've been working closely with the OPP.

In terms of, in this House, calling people criminals, I think it's beyond the pale. I don't think it should happen. I think that the member opposite should withdraw what he has said, but that is my opinion.

I have been very clear that I'm working with the authorities and will continue to do so.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Prince Edward–Hastings will come to order.

New question.

GOVERNMENT ASSETS

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: My question is to the Minister of Finance. There have been several media reports that the Ontario government will be allowing the sale of beer in grocery stores. In my own riding of Cambridge, not only have I had some constituents contact my office about these reports, but it has been the talk at hockey games, at restaurants and neighbour get-togethers.

It's no secret that the people of Ontario have been asking for more choice and convenience when purchasing alcohol. In my riding of Cambridge, we have a thriving local craft brewer in Grand River Brewing. Many of my constituents have told me that they are hopeful that local craft beers such as these will become more widely available.

Speaker, through you to the minister, are these reports true? And can the minister confirm that this is in the plans for the 2015 budget?

Hon. Charles Sousa: I do appreciate the question from the member from Cambridge. First of all, let's be clear: It's premature at this point to suggest that any decisions have been made about alcohol distribution in Ontario. Those discussions will be revealed in the 2015 budget.

The distribution and selling of alcohol responsibly is a public trust that this government takes seriously. We have been open about people's concerns around fairness of the Beer Store and the opportunity to improve customer convenience by ensuring there's a wide range of brands, including craft brew.

In so doing, the advisory council will be guided by three principles. The first is that the public interest must remain paramount and protected. The second is that any discussions taken must align with maximizing value to Ontario. Finally, and the most important, is that the process remains transparent, professional and independently validated.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: Thank you, Minister. I know the people of Ontario will be waiting eagerly for the 2015 budget.

However, I do have another question for the minister. There has been a lot of talk about the Premier's Advisory Council on Government Assets, led by Mr. Ed Clark. Unfortunately, some of that talk has been in the form of fearmongering by those who would, for their own benefit, seek to stop the government from maximizing the full value of the assets it owns to the benefit of the people of Ontario.

Speaker, through you, can the Minister of Finance tell us more about the council and their work?

Hon. Charles Sousa: Again, I appreciate the question.

As mentioned earlier, the Premier has asked Mr. Clark and the advisory council to ensure that their work be guided by those three important principles that I just mentioned.

Now that we've discussed the how, let's discuss the why. The review of the assets is important. The value is to unlock those assets by optimizing their value and to use them afterwards, investing them in key infrastructure priorities, that way improving people's quality of life and maximizing opportunities for the people of Ontario, as well as becoming more competitive. Every dollar realized from unlocking our assets will go into the Trillium Trust and then will be reinvested in important infrastructure needs. This will include building highways, bridges and public transit.

This has always been and will continue to be about maximizing the value of our assets—your assets in the end—and reinvesting them in a way that benefits the people of Ontario.

HYDRO ONE

Ms. Laurie Scott: My question is to the Minister of Energy. Ombudsman André Marin has received over 10,000 complaints about Hydro One, the most ever received regarding any one organization. If the skyrocketing cost of hydro wasn't already tough for customers to swallow, it has now been a year since the investigation into billing practices at Hydro One was launched, yet customers are still dealing with erratic overbilling and empty threats to shut off power in the coldest months.

Minister, since you didn't apologize to the people of Ontario for wasting \$2 billion on smart meters, will you take the high road today and apologize for the predatory actions of Hydro One?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: The member refers to the Ombudsman's investigation with respect to Hydro One. He has been doing a very comprehensive investigation. In the course of that, he's had about 10,000 complaints. He's referred 3,400 of them to Hydro One for resolution. Of those that the Ombudsman has referred for resolution, 99% of those have been met.

With respect to the disconnections, I'll deal with that in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Laurie Scott: I see first-hand the struggle that my constituents face trying to pay their hydro bills and deal with Hydro One. A staff member in my constituency office solely deals with helping residents of Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock with their Hydro One complaints. Minister, that's almost 40 hours a week cleaning up your mess.

The Ombudsman said that his upcoming report on hydro billing won't come with a bouquet of flowers. Minister, will it come with your walking papers, or is hydro too complex for the Ombudsman too?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: There are a significant number of people in our community who have been having

trouble with their hydro bills. We've come through the two worst winters in recent history. Hydro One has a policy of not disconnecting during the winter months, and they have been following that.

There has been some controversy over a particular letter that is being sent to people who are in a position where they could be cut off. Hydro One and the Ombudsman are working together to agree on a letter that would be more acceptable to the Ombudsman. They're working co-operatively.

NURSES

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée.

During the last general election, the Premier and her Minister of Health said that they would not cut front-line care and that they would not cut nursing positions. Right now, hospitals are laying off nurses almost every single day. Last week alone, we learned that Sudbury will lose 42 nurses, and the week before that the children's hospital of Ottawa was cutting 50 registered nurses, and in Cambridge, it's 22 registered nurses.

We all know that it is patients who will pay the price of these nursing cuts. Minister, how many more nurses will lose their jobs and how many patients will suffer before the Liberals stop these painful cuts to our front-line nurses?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: The member opposite is a fellow health care professional. I know she understands that as hospitals and other facilities evolve, change and add and subtract programs to better serve their constituents or their catchment area, often that requires a change in the complexion of health service providers who are there. Sometimes individuals are let go or laid off; others are hired. There's an ebb and flow that takes place regularly, and she knows this well, being a health care practitioner.

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But the reality is that in the last decade roughly—that's since 2003—there are more nurses working in this province. There are 24,000 more nurses working in this province. In fact, we added 3,500 nurses in 2013 and we continue to add nurses. Importantly, the percentage of those nurses who are working full-time has gone up significantly over the past decade as well.

We're making improvements. I understand that she wants to try to score some political points, but she should understand, being a health care worker, what the reality is.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: Well, it is the patients across this entire province who pay the price for the Liberal cuts to front-line care, cuts that we were told during the last election would not happen. But it is happening, Speaker. Cutting 50 nurses at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario will leave sick kids with less care. Seventy-five positions are being eliminated in North Bay hospital. In Sarnia, it's 39 nurses who are being cut, and nearly 40 positions will be lost in Timmins.

Every family understands that fewer nurses mean less care for the people who need it. What will it take for the Minister of Health to get the message and stop laying off front-line nurses?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Again, my fellow health care professional does understand—I know she does—that these changes that take place in our hospitals don't necessarily or always mean layoffs. Programs change and programs are added.

I was at CHEO, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, just a couple of weeks ago with a number of my colleagues, actually, announcing a new program there for pediatric chronic pain management. I know we opened a similar program just a couple of weeks ago in London as well, and two here in Toronto. We're adding staff to those programs as those new programs continue to evolve and expand.

In fact, on Health Sciences North, the member opposite—I know she knows that Health Sciences North has not cut nurses. They have not cut nurses in Health Sciences North.

I understand her perspective, but the reality, I think—if we need to look at any number, we need to look at the complement of nurses working in this province: 24,000 more working in the last decade than were before.

RAIL SAFETY

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. I was in Gogama recently, where we all saw that volatile train derailment that took place. According to the Railway Association of Canada, oil shipments moved by Canadian railways went from 500 car loads in 2009 to 160,000 car loads in 2013 alone.

The movement of oil by rail continues to increase, and this means that rail safety will continue to be a growing issue for our province. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Transportation please provide members of this House with an update on what our government is doing in response to the Gogama derailment?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to thank the member from Sudbury for a very important question on what I know is a very serious topic. I actually had the opportunity, as well, to see the derailment site myself when I visited the community of Gogama a number of days ago.

Speaker, I want to emphasize the fact that the safety of Ontario communities is our government's top priority. That's why I indicated some time ago that I intended to contact and in fact have contacted federal Transport Minister Lisa Raitt, as well as representatives from CN, about Saturday's derailment.

We are not the only province that is taking this issue seriously. I have spoken directly with my Quebec counterpart, Transport Minister Robert Poeti. Minister Poeti and I agree that the federal government needs to do more to ensure that another derailment incident does not happen in the future. That's why we wrote a joint letter to Minister Raitt to express our many concerns regarding the movement of dangerous goods by rail in Ontario and

Quebec, but also across the country. In light of the recent accident, we know that more needs to be done to better protect our communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: I want to thank the minister for providing an update to this House on the action we're taking in response to the Gogama derailment. I'm very pleased to hear that our government is working co-operatively with the Quebec government on this important issue.

While members of this House were relieved to know that no one was injured by that Saturday's accident, the effects of the derailment and the fear felt by those living in nearby communities remain very real.

We also know that we're not the only province that has felt effects of an accident like this. Quebec has also experienced the Lac-Mégantic disaster, which claimed the lives of 47 innocent people. Both our government and that of Quebec have chosen to work together to urge the federal government to ensure that disasters like this can never happen again.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister please tell members of this House what is contained in the joint letter that was sent to the federal transport minister, Lisa Raitt?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Thank you again to the member for asking that important question. As I mentioned, Minister Poeti and I sent a joint letter to Minister Raitt asking the federal government to take stronger action with respect to addressing this issue. We know that the Transportation Safety Board of Canada has warned that the existing standard for all new tank cars built for the transportation of flammable liquids is not sufficient.

A recent Transportation Safety Board review of Transport Canada's implementation of recommendations following the Lac-Mégantic disaster found that Transport Canada had not yet put in place an effective oversight regime. That's why our letter urges Transport Canada to work closely with the Transportation Safety Board as well as US regulatory authorities to better understand the cause of these accidents.

We've also asked that the federal government sit down with Minister Poeti and myself to provide us with an update on the actions that Transport Canada is taking to address this urgent situation—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer?

Hon. Steven Del Duca:—including an update on the implementation of the recommendations made in the Transportation Safety Board's report on the Lac-Mégantic disaster.

It is our hope that the federal government will work co-operatively with us—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.
New question.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Todd Smith: My question is for the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games. In mid-February you announced that roughly a quarter of the 1.2 million

tickets you've targeted to sell for the games have been sold. Despite being over 900,000 tickets short with just over three months to go, you've stopped ticket sales from March 9 to mid-April. The reason? To sell tickets for the Parapan Am Games. I have a hard time believing that you'll sell another 900,000 tickets total when you won't let people buy them.

Now, I know technology isn't your forte over there given the eHealth scandal and the SAMS scandal that's going on, but, Minister, it's a simple question. Why can't you sell tickets to the Pan Am Games and the Parapan Am Games at the same time?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I'd like to thank the member for this question. We've been able to sell 350,000 tickets for the Pan Am Games so far, and we're very, very proud of that number.

The reason why we stopped selling the Pan Am tickets to introduce the selling, during a short period, of the Parapan Am tickets is to make sure it gets the right type of attention the Parapan Am Games deserve.

This is the first time in the history of Pan Am/Parapan Am Games that we have a live broadcast for the para component that is full throughout the entire duration of the games; the first time that we have medals with Braille on them. We've built infrastructure that is the most accessible in the country, if not the world.

We are so proud of the para component of these games and we need to give it the right type of attention it deserves.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard, Mr. Speaker. All you have to do is run two separate computer systems.

Listen, guys—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. Thank you.

Please finish.

Mr. Todd Smith: It's ridiculous.

Minister, I want to draw your attention to a Price-waterhouseCoopers report prepared for your ministry back in 2009. That report ranks the likelihood of certain problems occurring with the Pan Am Games. Guess what has the highest probability of occurring? A shortfall in ticket sales, it said.

You've known since 2009 that you'd fall short of your nearly \$34 million in projected ticket revenue, yet you've still closed ticket sales to the Pan Am Games for over a month. I just want to know, will Ontario taxpayers be forced to pick up the tab for your inability to plan the games and to sell the tickets for the games?

Hon. Michael Coteau: You know, 350,000 tickets—the last time I checked, that's a pretty large number.

But in addition to those tickets, this is the first time in history that any sporting event has been able to attract 60,000 people to sign up to volunteer for these games—

60,000 people. We're very proud of the record on this side of the House.

Mr. Speaker, we are very confident with ticket sales, and we are very confident with these games. They're going to be the best games that Canada has ever put on.

1120

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mr. Peter Tabuns: My question is to the Minister of Education. Schools are at the heart of our communities, but this Liberal government wants to cut education funding and shut down schools across this province. Last fall, the New Democrats uncovered the Liberals' plan to cut \$500 million from our schools. Now we know that 48 schools in Toronto alone are facing closure. This unprecedented wave of school closures will make life harder for families by selling off green space and closing child care spots across the city. How can the minister defend her plan to shut down schools and wring public funding out of classrooms at the expense of our students?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I really do need to talk about the premise of your question, because the idea that we have cut funding to public education is, quite frankly, preposterous. We have, in fact, increased funding of schools by 56.5% since 2003. That's an increase of 56.5% while the enrollment has been declining. The per pupil funding has gone up; it has gone up by over \$4,000 per pupil for each and every pupil in Ontario, Speaker. So this whole idea that we're out there cutting funding is absolutely preposterous.

The same is true of child care funding: Child care funding has also gone up, as have the number of child care spaces.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Speaker, the simple reality is that the minister has issued discussion documents telling school boards to be prepared for cuts of 1.5% to 2%—\$500 million in cuts. The minister, this morning, did not use the normal argument that we're funding empty seats in our schools, a key part of her argument.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives actually did the math. They called the ministry's numbers on the empty schools "bogus" numbers. Speaker, that means that the Liberals are defending their school closure plans by using bad math, and forcing Toronto families to pay the price. When will the minister show parents the respect they deserve and stop using bogus numbers to justify deep Liberal cuts for children's schools?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Actually, it was interesting to see what Margaret Wilson had to say about this whole issue, because Margaret Wilson looked at it, and she said, yes, there are a lot of schools in Toronto in which there is unused space. We had examples of 70 kids in a school that was built for 500, 300 kids in a school that was built for 1,000. We actually believe, Speaker, that what we need to do is concentrate on funding good programs for children who are there.

Of course, TDSB—and many other boards, but TDSB in particular—has identified that it has a backlog of renewal. Why does it have a backlog of renewal? Because it's spending all its money on trying to maintain space that isn't required. We want them to focus on maintaining the space that is required and on providing program for kids who are there.

TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Mr. Han Dong: My question is also to the Minister of Education. I appreciate this opportunity to stand up in this House and ask a question that truly concerns the many constituents in my riding, especially the students, educators and parents like me. It's about the Toronto District School Board. The TDSB is the largest and most diverse school board in Canada, with approximately 246,000 students attending nearly 600 schools. Public confidence in the TDSB is critical to ensuring public confidence across the entire education system. I know constituents in my riding and across the city are concerned about the recent events taking place at the board. Minister, can you please tell the House how our government is handling these issues at the TDSB?

Hon. Liz Sandals: The member is correct that public confidence in our school systems is absolutely critical.

Given some of the problems last November, I asked Margaret Wilson to have a look at the operational issues at the Toronto District School Board. Her observations were very troubling and confirmed the need for our government to take action, which is why I directed the TDSB to comply with 13 directions which reflected Margaret's recommendations. I was encouraged to see that the TDSB has made some progress on a number of those directions. Clearly, it has ignited a discussion around community hubs, the role of trustees and a number of issues.

One of Margaret's recommendations was to appoint a panel to actually consult with the community and to make recommendations about more effective governance. That's why last week I announced the appointment of the panel which Margaret recommended.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Han Dong: I thank the minister for her answer. I know constituents in my riding will be pleased to hear that our government has taken action to ensure governance issues at the TDSB do not become an impediment to student achievement and well-being. I know our government's top priority is the well-being of our students and to ensure that our students continue to achieve excellence.

I am also encouraged to hear that progress is being made by the TDSB on a number of directions. You mentioned that the seven-member expert panel will conduct public consultations within the local TDSB community. Minister, could you please tell this House some more information about the committee of advisers and what they will be looking into?

Hon. Liz Sandals: The seven-member panel will be led by Barbara Hall, who of course is just stepping down

as Ontario's Human Rights Commissioner. She's also got a lot of experience as a lawyer and municipal politician, and a strong record in the ability to bring diverse groups together to solve problems.

The panel will be consulting with the TDSB community and make will recommendations on how to improve the governance structure at the TDSB. The panel will be looking for ways to create a supportive and inclusive culture at the board that will continue to support the success and well-being of our students, and to address the culture of fear which Margaret identified.

The panel will be leading 15 to 20 public consultations but the panel will also consult with trustees, senior staff, principals and union representatives across the TDSB, and will be reporting in the summer of—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE

Mr. Jeff Yurek: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Minister, under the imposed contract with doctors in Ontario there is a lack of clarity of where in rural Ontario doctors will be allowed to practise—in particular, the use of your term “high-needs area.” In fact, your ministry has provided little detail in the definition of a high-needs area.

Minister, throughout rural Ontario, many communities have a shortage of doctors which you have ignored. Can you please provide me with your definition of a high-needs area and what communities will fall under this definition?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I hope in the supplement of the member opposite's question he will be a little more specific because I would hope that he knows that doctors are entitled to practise wherever they want in this province. It's not a matter of restricting their ability to practise in the north, for example, or in southwestern Ontario or here in Toronto.

If what he's in fact referring to is a specific category of those family doctors who choose to practise in family health teams—and I will only be able to determine this based on the supplemental—we are proposing and making some modest changes as well so that we can focus physicians in that important investment of family health teams in those parts of the province which need them the most. In the north, for example, where we currently have 40 family health teams, we need more. In other parts, in the underserved areas of the province and in rural Ontario, we have about 60 family health teams. We need more.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Speaker, the minister does know the fact that the majority of graduates and doctors are in family health teams, so to go off on that tangent is pure humbug.

Minister, due to the imposed contract with the current doctors, new graduates are going to leave this province.

In addition, medical students will move to other specializations than family practice.

With an aging population and the retirement of many family doctors, the need for family physicians is only going to grow. Can you please provide the Legislature with your estimate as to how many fewer family physicians will be practising in this province as a result of your government's imposed contracts?

1130

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Well, the answer to that question is that there will be more family physicians and more physicians and specialists practising in this province. In fact, since 2003, there are now 5,000 more doctors practising in Ontario as a result of our investments, and our family doctors have grown by 20% more in that decade. Our specialists have increased by 26%.

We've made significant investments to continue to attract doctors, but we also need to make sure—I think the member opposite would agree—that we deploy those physicians and we provide incentives to those places that really do need a family doctor or need that specialist to serve them.

Despite the fact that now 93% of Ontarians have access to a primary health care provider, that's not enough. We need to continue to make those investments, but we also need to make sure that those rural parts of Ontario, including the north, as I mentioned, have family health teams. We have to make sure that we provide the level of services that those parts of the province deserve and require.

RAIL SAFETY

M^{me} France Gélinas: Ma question est pour le ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique. As we all know, Speaker, on March 7, a CN train derailed. Dozens of cars spilled their oil and caught fire just outside of beautiful Gogama. The effect on the community and the environment has been severe and devastating.

Speaker, people throughout Ontario want their government to send businesses who deal with transporting dangerous goods to other communities a very clear message. Is the minister ready to use his own power to send that clear message to those businesses that they must operate safely or not at all, and that they are responsible for every penny needed to clean up the environment now and into the future?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I'm very glad the member has asked the question. It's disappointing that it's taken so many weeks for her to get up and ask a question on an issue that is now that old.

As you know, briefings were given to members opposite and the full weight of our very considerable authority is being applied in this situation. Staff were on the ground the first day—water, air and soil monitoring and remediation. CN is picking up all of the costs and providing capacity investments in those.

As you know from the briefing that you were given, we are now reviewing our legal options. We're also working with Quebec and with both the Quebec and Ontario ministers of transportation. We presented a common front to the federal government to increase their standards and their practices to avoid these from happening in the future.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

M^{me} France Gélinas: We know that the CN train derailment and spill has changed Gogama forever. I've talked to dozens of families from Gogama and from the Mattagami First Nation, and they are really worried. They are worried about what their future holds, especially if their livelihood depends on the natural resources.

Will the minister use the power that he has under the Environmental Protection Act to assist the people of Gogama and Mattagami First Nation in establishing claims against CN and the company who owns the crude oil?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I think the member and her colleagues opposite know from briefings they have received that that entire process is already under way. We have specific legal authorities as a province, which we are exercising to the maximum of the law. We are also asking the federal government to do that. This includes people in tourism and in fishing. These are very important.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very concerned. Had this accident happened two kilometres farther down the track, it would have happened in the community of Gogama, and we could have faced another Lac-Mégantic.

This government and past ministers of transportation and the environment have raised this for years with the federal government jointly with our colleagues in Quebec. We have failed to see any action. We have had four derailments in northern Ontario. We've had Lac-Mégantic. We had Mount Carbon in West Virginia, which was a horrible tragedy, and we've had two in Illinois.

Rail standards and safe transportation of dangerous goods have been a priority for this government. It's about time it was a priority for the federal government.

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Arthur Potts: My question is also to the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. I, too, am delighted to hear so many of the members opposite asking questions that matter to their constituents, and there are matters that are important to this House.

In that vein, Mr. Speaker, as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, I would like to ask a question about the Owen Sound Sun Times, which had an article recently about an issue that concerned that community. The city of Owen Sound would like this government to help them pay for some of the increased costs they're facing due to broken water mains. We in Beaches–East York face the same concern. More pipes were frozen in Beaches–East York this winter than in any other part of the city of Toronto.

But the article goes on to say that the Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound Progressive Conservative member plans to speak to Liberal Minister Glen Murray as soon as the Legislature resumes today. He hasn't asked that question, so I will. Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You should disallow that question.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'd like to be the Speaker.

I am not impressed with anyone who puts assignment to any other member in this House. It's not appropriate, and it won't be done.

Minister?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Yes, this is a very critical issue. We are facing unprecedented levels of impact on municipal infrastructure. We look at Burlington. Burlington, one of our newest suburban communities, now has a stormwater system that I know the Minister of Infrastructure will tell you is at capacity and needs major reinvestment, because we're now experiencing once-in-a-hundred-years flood events almost every second year now.

Communities like Bancroft are facing flood events like they've never experienced before, and we're seeing that in Owen Sound, which is why this government has put this issue forward.

We have had weeks—with these kinds of communities, whether it's Bancroft or whether it's Owen Sound—of members opposite claiming they were concerned about this, while we've had radio silence in this House.

I'm very glad the member for Beaches–East York is raising these issues, because they are very, very critical. I'm sure my colleague the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing would like to talk about this further.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Arthur Potts: My apologies to the House. It was not my intention to make assignment.

I would like, however, to get a more specific response to the issues in Owen Sound. Mayor Ian Boddy and his council would like provincial assistance to cover between \$500,000 and \$1 million in additional costs associated with these frozen water pipes.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister, will our government help the municipality of Owen Sound when it comes to covering off these costs?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'd like to thank the member from Beaches–East York for taking the opportunity to raise this issue.

We've had a particularly cold winter, and I'm aware of concerns about frozen pipes and water main breaks in some municipalities across the province. Although the winter was severe, our cities and towns have a responsibility to plan and manage their infrastructure assets responsibly.

I remain committed to touring the province and hearing from as many municipal councils as possible. In fact, this afternoon, I'll be visiting with my 115th mayor and council when I head up to Grey Highlands in order to listen to their concerns and bring those concerns back to my colleagues here in government.

Mr. Bill Walker: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to suggest that I'm not satisfied with that answer and would like to perhaps—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When I stand, you sit.

I'm going to leave this with all of you. This was not a race to the top. The righteous indignation of everyone in this House takes place when you don't race to the top.

VISITOR

Mr. John Fraser: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Ottawa South.

Mr. John Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I was remiss this morning when I introduced page Joe Fast. I forgot to mention his father, Stewart Fast, who's in the gallery today.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins-James Bay on a point of order.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: A point of order, Speaker: I said "broke the law." I should have said "allegedly broke the law" in my question.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member is correct: At any time that any member wants to correct their record, they can do so.

There are no deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1140 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CHATHAM MEMORIAL ARENA

Mr. Rick Nicholls: I'm incredibly honoured to say that Chatham-Kent has made the top 10 of the Kraft Hockeyville 2015 competition.

Hockey has a rich history throughout this country, and it brings entire communities together to celebrate the game we all love. In Chatham, that gathering place is at the Chatham Memorial Arena. First built in 1949 on the grounds of a training area used by the Canadian Forces during World War II, the Chatham Memorial Arena is the oldest arena in the community, yet it has had the fewest upgrades. It has been home to the Chatham Senior

Maroons, who won the Allan Cup back in 1960—yes, Speaker, I do remember that—and also the Chatham Junior Maroons, who won the Sutherland Cup for Junior B hockey in 1999. I actually gave that team a motivational speech when they were down three games to nothing against Leamington, also in my riding. They came back to not only win that series but the league championship, and then they went on to win the Sutherland Cup.

Interjection: It must have been the speech.

Mr. Rick Nicholls: Had to be the speech.

Our area manager, Brian Bennet, has been a part of the arena since the 1960s. He devotes himself to the arena and the community, and he could use some help. The roof needs some work. The bathrooms need upgrades, and I'm sure that hockey players would love to see some larger dressing rooms. The same hard benches that were installed in 1949 remain as seating today. The arena offers a rustic, and some might even say rough, atmosphere.

The winner of the contest will receive \$100,000 in arena upgrades and host an NHL pre-season game. So I encourage every member of the Legislature to get out and vote especially for Chatham-Kent.

CO-OP PROGRAMS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: Last week was co-op week in Canada, and to celebrate the occasion, two Ontario students were honoured as national co-op students of the year: Andrew Andrade from the University of Waterloo and Rumman Ullah Khan from Fanshawe College, which, I am proud to say, is located in my home community of London.

Andrew Andrade is a third-year engineering student from Mississauga. During an entrepreneurial co-op work term at the University of Waterloo, he not only co-founded his own start-up, PetroPredict, but he also hired and supervised four other co-op students to assist with his software business.

Rumman Ullah Khan is an international student, studying business marketing at Fanshawe College, who has completed three co-op work terms and praises the opportunities that co-operative education provides.

Rumman is exactly the kind of immigrant we need in London and in Ontario. I urge the Liberal government to advocate strongly to ensure that the new express entry immigration process does not create barriers for international students like Rumman.

On behalf of the NDP caucus, I want to congratulate Andrew and Rumman. Congratulations as well to Ali Zaheer from Sheridan College and Skye Wattie from the University of Waterloo, who also received Ontario Co-op Student of the Year Awards from Education at Work Ontario. The excellence and achievements demonstrated by these four young people shows how co-op programs benefit students and the Ontario economy.

I hope all members of this Legislature will support my private member's bill, Protecting Interns and Creating a

Learning Economy Act, that will expand co-op programs in this province.

THE SPEAKER

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: Mr. Speaker, as I stand here today

With something I really must say,
I hope you're listening at the back
And I hope you don't mind
That I share it in rhyme,
For it's about a sage man called Levac.

For o'er 10 and five years,
You have worked in this sphere
As MPP for the riding of Brant,
But for the last few
You had much more to do
As the Speaker, with pow'r to end rants.

The Speaker, you'll know,
Is not just for show.
He presides over all in this House.
With the guardian here
The debate rules are clear,
Defined well beyond any doubts.

In most recent days,
Debate's been ablaze,
With the same points ever repeated.
Your response has been just,
You're holding our trust,
Though discussions are oft overheated.

Alas, here we are,
Spring break now seems afar,
How we long for a changed conversation.
But no ... it's more: "I stand, you sit,
"Twice warned and that's it!"
Instead of our new legislation.

Legislative changes much needed,
Demands for "Order!" not always heeded,
I listen, yet shake my head in awe.
Teacher and principal at heart,
Your compassion and patience—true art,
How the daily antics here surely must gnaw.

So let it be known
While insults are thrown
That we truly respect what you do.
To the citizens of Brant
I direct my rant
From this House's heart: Hear, hear; thank you.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Because I heard some heckling, I want to hear it again.

Sorry, members' statements. The member for Perth—Wellington.

PADDYFEST

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: This past weekend I was pleased to celebrate Paddyfest in Listowel. Paddyfest is a two-week-long Irish festival organized by the Kin clubs of Listowel. Now in its 38th year, it is one of North America's biggest Irish festivals.

Paddyfest is packed with events, including concerts, sporting tournaments and family fun activities. I spent Saturday morning flipping pancakes at the Paddyfest pancake breakfast and taking part in the Paddyfest parade, which brings the whole community out.

I would like to thank the Kinsmen and Kinette clubs of Listowel for their hard work organizing yet another successful Paddyfest. I would also like to recognize Melissa Dunphy, this year's Paddyfest ambassador.

There was a great turnout at this year's Paddyfest. Proceeds will be going towards community projects, including the Steve Kerr Memorial Complex. We hope the province will join us in supporting this project.

Again, thank you to the organizers, the volunteers and the sponsors who contributed to Paddyfest, and thank you to the North Perth community for coming together to enjoy this year's festival.

INDIAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Today I rise to commemorate three freedom fighters who opposed British oppression in India and fought for the independence of India, in fact. Those three individuals are Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev Thapar and Shivaram Rajguru.

March 23, 1931, is recognized as martyrdom day. They fought for an independent place, an independent country. They fought for a place which would respect human rights, freedom and the dignity of life.

However, it's ironic that three days earlier, March 20, in the year 2000, there were very heinous massacres that occurred and which were perpetrated ostensibly by the Indian government itself. This is not the type of India that these three brave souls gave their lives to defend. This is not the India that these brave souls fought for the independence of.

Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev Thapar and Shivaram Rajguru fought for a free and independent country, not a country which is responsible for mass human rights violations, particularly what happened in the Chattisinghpura massacre, which is connected with the Pathribal killings as well as the Barakpora killings.

Bhagat Singh stated—and it's a very strong and powerful quote: "It is easy to kill individuals, but you cannot kill their ideas. Great empires crumbled while the ideas survived." In memory of Baghat Singh, let us hope that we can move towards a society where all can live in freedom and justice.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Ann Hoggarth: During constituency week I had the pleasure of touring and making a funding

announcement at the clubhouse at the Canadian Mental Health Association Simcoe County. The CMHA Simcoe County Branch is a non-profit charitable association funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care through the local health integration network. Funding is also provided by the United Way and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

Founded in 1960, Barrie Mental Health provided the city of Barrie with its first psychiatrist. This agency also provided community education, advocacy and volunteers to go to the Oak Ridge facility in Penetanguishene. CMHA Barrie-Simcoe continued to grow, offering a full range of services including case management, employment opportunities, a social-recreational clubhouse, and housing services. In 2010, CMHA Simcoe amalgamated with Simcoe Outreach Services.

When new clients arrive, they are welcomed by greeter cats Daisy and Lilly. Led by Lynne Raimondi and Lori Howcroft through the RSVP program at the clubhouse, clients are then provided with recreational, social, vocational and peer support.

I am pleased to recognize the dedicated staff and volunteers for all the invaluable work that they do for our community. Thank you.

1310

ANATOLIAN HERITAGE FEDERATION

Mr. Todd Smith: Today, our friends from the Anatolian Heritage Federation have come to Queen's Park to host their annual friendship reception in support of Turkic Canadian solidarity and cultural heritage, and we welcome them. I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome our friends and thank members from the communities for their many contributions to the multicultural fabric of our province.

The Anatolian Heritage Federation is a not-for-profit organization that represents Turkic communities right across Ontario. On this special occasion, I'd like to inform you that the Ontario PC caucus will be co-sponsoring a bill to proclaim one week in March every year as Turkic Heritage Week in Ontario, in order to remember and share the cultural heritage and educate future generations about the inspirational role that Turkic Canadians have played and continue to play in communities in Ontario.

Turkic Heritage Week shall occur during the third or fourth week of March, whichever includes the 21st day—and that's the day we mark the first day of spring and promote values of peace and solidarity between generations and within families.

On behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, I'd like to wish members of the Anatolian Heritage Federation and all attendees of today's friendship reception a very happy and successful event. I strongly believe that with the help of all of our colleagues here in the Ontario Legislature, the proposed bill will become a law, and I'm confident that one year from now, we'll all celebrate Turkic Heritage Week for the first time in the history of our province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We welcome our guests.

COMMUNITY SKATE

Mr. Arthur Potts: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to tell you about St. Patrick's Day, when I hosted—not hoisted—my first community skate at the East York Memorial Arena in Beaches—East York.

Constituents of all ages came out to enjoy hot chocolate and cookies provided by the local McDonald's. They received a Toronto Maple Leafs program from MLSE and took in the dulcet sounds of New Orleans jazz performed live by our constituent Patrick Tevlin and his band, The Happy Pals.

The kids wasted no time to lace up, show their moves and play games of tag. Dozens of families from Crescent Town, Main Square, Parma Court and the Second communities came out to participate. Parents and kids alike were very appreciative, many saying that this was the best part of March break.

I'd like to thank Tameem Sharifi of the Thorncliffe Park youth centre for providing us with four hockey bags filled with skates and helmets. Because of their generous donation, many kids for the very first time had an opportunity to come out and skate.

I remember one little girl, Alisha. It was her first time on skates and she could barely stand up, but she was absolutely determined to make it around the rink. About a half an hour later, there she was, with a little help from friends and family, standing there with a big smile on her face, and you could see that her mother was equally proud.

Mr. Speaker, a big thanks to my staff, the volunteers and the companies that helped put on this event and for all those who came out. I look forward to an even bigger and better event next year. It's been just a tremendous opportunity to enjoy the community's activities.

OTTAWA BIRTH AND WELLNESS CENTRE

CENTRE DE NAISSANCE ET DE BIEN-ÊTRE D'OTTAWA

Mr. John Fraser: I rise today in recognition of the incredible work being done at the Ottawa Birth and Wellness Centre, also known as the OBWC, located in my riding of Ottawa South. Earlier this month, I was pleased to attend the centre's first birthday party, and it was a wonderful celebration. The centre was the first of its kind in Ontario and is an important partner in child and maternal health. We're very fortunate to have it located in the heart of our community.

Over the past year, the Ottawa Birth and Wellness Centre has provided 450 moms and their families with more options for natural childbirth in an environment that is safe and respectful. They have become known for their responsiveness and professionalism and are regarded as insightful leaders in our community.

My father used to say that each time we welcome the birth of a new baby, it means a little more hope for the world. Mon père disait toujours qu'à chaque fois qu'un bébé est né, cela signifie du nouvel espoir pour le monde.

Congratulations to everyone at the Ottawa Birth and Wellness Centre on your one-year anniversary and thank you for bringing a little more hope to our world.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

ONTARIO SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AMENDMENT ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 MODIFIANT LA LOI SUR LA SOCIÉTÉ DE PROTECTION DES ANIMAUX DE L'ONTARIO

Mr. Naqvi moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 80, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Animals for Research Act with respect to the possession and breeding of orcas and administrative requirements for animal care / Projet de loi 80, Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Société de protection des animaux de l'Ontario et la Loi sur les animaux destinés à la recherche en ce qui concerne la possession et l'élevage d'épaulards ainsi que les exigences administratives relatives aux soins dispensés aux animaux.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement?

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Today we are moving forward with a bill that amends the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and makes related amendments to the Animals for Research Act.

The Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act will be amended to prohibit the breeding and acquisition of orcas in Ontario. The bill also enables regulation-making authority to set administrative standards of care for marine mammals, such as dolphins, belugas and walrus, to ensure the best possible care and conditions for these animals.

731149 ONTARIO LIMITED ACT, 2015

Mr. Bailey moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr17, An Act to revive 731149 Ontario Limited.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

MOTIONS

COMMITTEE REPORT

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Notwithstanding the order of the House dated December 11, 2014, the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment be authorized to present its interim report no later than June 24, 2015.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Naqvi moves that, notwithstanding the order of the House dated December 11, 2014, the Select Committee on Sexual Violence and Harassment be authorized to present its interim report no later than June 24, 2015. Do we agree? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I believe you will find that we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding committee membership.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I move that Ms. DiNovo replace Ms. Forster on the membership for the Standing Committee on Estimates, and Mr. Singh replace Madame Gélina on the membership of the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Naqvi moves that Ms. DiNovo replace Ms. Forster on the membership for the Standing Committee on Estimates, and Mr. Singh replace Madame Gélina on the membership of the Standing Committee on Social Policy. Do we agree? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Mr. Bill Walker: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are progressive, degenerative diseases of the brain that

cause thinking, memory and physical functioning to become seriously impaired;

"Whereas there is no known cause or cure for this devastating illness; and

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias also take their toll on hundreds of thousands of families and care partners; and

"Whereas Alzheimer's disease and other dementias affect more than 200,000 Ontarians today, with an annual total economic burden rising to \$15.7 billion by 2020; and

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"Whereas the cost related to the health care system is in the billions and only going to increase, at a time when our health care system is already facing enormous financial challenges; and

"Whereas there is work under way to address the need, but no coordinated or comprehensive approach to tackling the issues; and

"Whereas there is an urgent need to plan and raise awareness and understanding about Alzheimer's disease and other dementias for the sake of improving the quality of life of the people it touches;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To approve the development of a comprehensive Ontario dementia plan that would include the development of strategies in primary health care, in health promotion and prevention of illness, in community development, in building community capacity and care partner engagement, in caregiver support and investments in research."

I fully support it and sign it, and give it to page Danielle.

EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS

Ms. Peggy Sattler: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

"Whereas there are an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 unpaid internships in Canada each year; and

"Whereas youth unemployment in Ontario is over 15%; and

"Whereas the Ontario Ministry of Labour is not adequately enforcing the laws on unpaid internships;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take the following actions:

"(1) Proactively enforce the law on unpaid internships;

"(2) Engage in an educational campaign to inform students, youth, employers, educational institutions and the general public of the laws surrounding unpaid internships; and

"(3) Undertake a comprehensive review of the current laws surrounding unpaid internships in Ontario."

I fully support this petition, affix my name to it, and will give it to page Cameron to take to the table.

OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

Mr. Steve Clark: I've just got to get the right one here, because Norm Miller is behind me.

This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas it has been over a decade since regulation 316/03 of the Highway Traffic Act has been updated to recognize new classes of off-road vehicles and a motion to do so passed on November 7, 2013, with unanimous support of the provincial Legislature;

"Whereas owners of two-up ATVs and side-by-side UTVs deserve clarity in knowing which roadways and trails are legal for use of these off-road vehicles; and

"Whereas owners should be able to legally use their vehicles to access woodlots, trails and hunting and fishing destinations;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That private member's Bill 58, which seeks to update the Highway Traffic Act to include new classes of all-terrain and utility task vehicles, receive swift passage through the Legislature."

I'm pleased to affix my signature and send it to the table with page Jade.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas emergency response workers (paramedics, police officers, and firefighters) confront traumatic events on a nearly daily basis to provide safety to the public; and

"Whereas many emergency response workers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of their work; and

"Whereas Bill 2 'An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder' sets out that if an emergency response worker suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, the disorder is presumed to be an occupational disease that occurred due to their employment as an emergency response worker, unless the contrary is shown;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to unanimously endorse and quickly pass Bill 2 'An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder'."

I sign this petition and give it to page Kari.

CREDIT UNIONS

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario support our 1.3 million members across Ontario through loans to small businesses to start up, grow and create jobs, help families

to buy homes and assist their communities with charitable investments and volunteering; and

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario want a level playing field so they can provide the same service to our members as other financial institutions and promote economic growth without relying on taxpayers’ resources;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Support the strength and growth of credit unions to support the strength and growth of Ontario’s economy and create jobs in three ways:

—maintain current credit union provincial tax rates;

—show confidence in Ontario credit unions by increasing credit union-funded deposit insurance limits to a minimum of \$250,000;

—allow credit unions to diversify by allowing Ontario credit unions to own 100% of subsidiaries.”

I support the intent of this petition, affix my signature to it and hand it to page Aiden.

HEALTH CARE FUNDING

Mr. Norm Miller: I have petitions that were given to me at the Save Our Services rally for the hospitals in Bracebridge and Huntsville on the weekend—thousands of signatures. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we categorically reject the notion that core services such as surgical procedures should ever be moved to one hospital site in Muskoka and that doing so would have an adverse effect on our municipalities;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“We urge our leaders to act now to reject single siting surgery and/or other core services that would result in the closure or downgrading of either acute care site in Muskoka. We believe the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care needs to address the health care funding model as it applies to Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare, which will avoid the situation as it stands.”

Mr. Speaker, I fully support this petition. I have signed it and will give it to Luc.

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas social assistance benefits in Ontario leave recipients far below the poverty line, struggling to meet the basic costs of living, and without any resources to handle emergencies;

“Whereas the provincial government recently cut the Community Start-up and Maintenance Benefit;

“Whereas the Community Start-up and Maintenance Benefit helped families pay for basic utilities in emergency situations and helped prevent people from becoming homeless;

“Whereas this program provided options for vulnerable people including women, children and people with disabilities to escape domestic violence and transition to safer housing;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the province of Ontario restore full funding for the Community Start-up and Maintenance Benefit and ensure that it goes directly to those who need it.”

I couldn’t agree with this more, Mr. Speaker. I’m going to affix my name to it and give it to Thomas to bring to the Clerk.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Mr. Arthur Potts: I have a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

“Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

“Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

“Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

“Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

“Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario.”

I agree with this petition. I sign my name and leave it with page Jessie.

TAXATION

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Liberal government has indicated they plan on introducing a new carbon tax in 2015; and

“Whereas Ontario taxpayers have already been burdened with a health tax of \$300 to \$900 per person that doesn’t necessarily go into health care, a \$2-billion smart

meter program that failed to conserve energy, and households are paying almost \$700 more annually for unaffordable subsidies under the Green Energy Act; and

“Whereas a carbon tax scheme would increase the cost of everyday goods including gasoline and home heating; and

“Whereas the government continues to run unaffordable deficits without a plan to reduce spending while collecting \$30 billion more annually in tax revenues than 11 years ago; and

“Whereas the aforementioned points lead to the conclusion that the government is seeking justification to raise taxes to pay for their excessive spending, without accomplishing any concrete targets;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To abandon the idea of introducing yet another unaffordable and ineffective tax on Ontario families and businesses.”

I fully support it, will affix my name and send it with page 1an.

GASOLINE PRICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that was put together by Mrs. Kathryn Farrell from Garson, in my riding. It reads as follows:

“Whereas northern Ontario motorists continue to be subject to wild fluctuations in the price of gasoline; and

“Whereas the province could eliminate opportunistic price gouging and deliver fair, stable and predictable fuel prices; and

“Whereas five provinces and many US states already have some sort of ... price regulation; and

“Whereas jurisdictions with gas-price regulation have seen an end to wild ... fluctuations, a shrinking of price discrepancies between urban and rural communities and lower annualized gas prices;”

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They “petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario” to:

“Mandate the Ontario Energy Board to monitor the price of gasoline across Ontario in order to reduce price volatility and unfair regional price differences while encouraging competition.”

I support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask Jade to bring it to the Clerk.

CREDIT UNIONS

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I have a petition here that’s addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario support our 1.3 million members across Ontario through loans to small businesses to start up, grow and create jobs, help families to buy homes and assist their communities with charitable investments and volunteering; and

“Whereas Credit Unions of Ontario want a level playing field so they can provide the same service to our

members as other financial institutions and promote economic growth without relying on taxpayers’ resources;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“Support the strength and growth of credit unions to support the strength and growth of Ontario’s economy and create jobs in three ways:

“—maintain current credit union provincial tax rates;

“—show confidence in Ontario credit unions by increasing credit union-funded deposit insurance limits to a minimum of \$250,000;

“—allow credit unions to diversify by allowing ... credit unions to own 100% of subsidiaries.”

I agree with this petition. I’m affixing my signature to it, and I’m handing it over to page Natasha.

WINTER ROAD MAINTENANCE

Mr. Norm Miller: I’ve received petitions from Golden Valley, Ontario, with regard to improved winter road maintenance. It reads:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the area maintenance contract system has failed Ontario drivers the past two winters;

“Whereas unsafe conditions led to the maintenance contractor being fined in the winter of 2013-14, as well as leading to a special investigation by the provincial Auditor General;

“Whereas the managed outsourcing system for winter roads maintenance, where the private contractor is responsible for maintenance, but MTO patrols the region and directs the contractor on the deployment of vehicles, sand and salt, has a proven track record for removing snow and ensuring that Ontario’s highways are safe for travellers;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ontario Ministry of Transportation take immediate action to improve the maintenance of winter roads based on the positive benefits of the previous delivery model, where MTO plays more of a role in directing the private contractor.”

I support this petition and give it to Aiden.

MUNICIPALITIES

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I have a petition signed by a number of constituents in London West. It reads as follows:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas questionable activities and ethical lapses have been occurring by elected officials in various municipalities throughout the province; and

“Whereas in the city of London the Ontario Ombudsman has been repeatedly asked to investigate questionable conduct by elected officials, including secret private meetings in apparent contravention of the Municipal Act; and

"Whereas the Municipal Act of Ontario lacks the legal mechanisms to prevent such closed meetings from happening, lacks concrete consequences to discipline conduct breaches, and provides no mechanism to suspend or remove a municipal council member facing or being convicted of criminal charges;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To re-evaluate and amend the Municipal Act, and the Ombudsman Act, to ensure the integrity of our democracy. We call upon you to help restore the public's confidence and trust in our municipal governments by ensuring accountability and providing citizens a means to initiate disciplinary recourse where and when appropriate."

I affix my name to this petition and will give it to page Luc to take to the table.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that reads as follows:

"Whereas providing patients with access to information about their medical doctor's treatment history is fundamental to regulating the medical profession and ensuring Ontario's health care system is accountable and transparent;

"Whereas currently, Ontario patients do not have access to this information, which is also an important measure to improve patient safety and empower them when making decisions about medical treatment;

"Whereas making public all information about complaints, cautions and remedial action taken against a physician does not diminish the College of Physicians and Surgeons' ability to self-regulate, but rather brings balance to the relationship between doctors and patients;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care act immediately to implement the transparency and accountability measures contained in Bill 29, An Act to amend the Medicine Act, 1991."

I'm pleased to affix my signature in support and send it to the table with page Ian.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PROTECTION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA PROTECTION DU DROIT À LA PARTICIPATION AUX AFFAIRES PUBLIQUES

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 5, 2015, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 52, An Act to amend the Courts of Justice Act, the Libel and Slander Act and the Statutory Powers

Procedure Act in order to protect expression on matters of public interest / Projet de loi 52, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les tribunaux judiciaires, la Loi sur la diffamation et la Loi sur l'exercice des compétences légales afin de protéger l'expression sur les affaires d'intérêt public.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): When this item was last debated, the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton had the floor. I will recognize the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It's my pleasure to continue debate on this important piece of legislation. What I discussed earlier was how important this bill was in terms of protecting public participation. It's, again, a hallmark of our society that people need to be able to participate in discourse, particularly on matters that impact their communities, so it should go without saying that people should be encouraged, not discouraged, from participating in issues that affect where they live and how they live. This law will address that.

When we speak about public participation, we also need to talk about other forms of public participation, and those areas that need to be addressed as well. One of the most important ways that people can participate in public discourse is through protest. Protest, or dissent, is often referred to as the hallmark of a democracy, a hallmark of a free society. You need to be able to get up and say, "I disagree with what's going on." While we, in this legislation, are looking to protect public discourse, so that people don't get sued in a strategic way that is seeking to silence them, so that people who raise their concerns are not going to suffer from a long, drawn-out legal battle that seeks to discourage them from participating in whatever the discourse was, we also need to look at the other forms of public discourse, namely protests.

The G20—we referred to this a number of times—was one of the worst examples, one of the worst cases of civil rights violations in the history of Ontario and, in fact, one of the most heinous acts of civil rights violation in the history of Canada. It was something that happened due to a number of factors, including the use of the PWSA, the Public Works Protection Act, which is also a law that is overly broad, overly vague and resulted in some gross violations.

But there is also another area. There is a certain combative culture that exists right now between the police and the citizenship. That combative relationship needs to be addressed. It's something that requires a culture shift. When I spoke at an event just a year or so back, there was an association of police boards, and they had made recommendations on how to improve upon what happened at the G20. I was invited to speak, and they asked me, "We want you to be critical. We don't want you to hold your punches. If there's something we can improve upon, look at our report and speak freely." I warned them, "If I'm given free licence to speak freely, I will actually do that." They encouraged me. They said, "For sure. Speak freely and let us know what you think."

One of the sections of the report talked about the improvements they need to do around protests. They re-

ferred to protests and they said, "We need to improve our strategies around crowd control." I got up and I said—I want to share this with you, as well, as members of the Legislature—that right off the bat, when you discuss dealing with protesters as "crowd control," it creates a combat. It creates a divide between the police and the everyday citizens. It creates a tension. The suggestion is that the police are going to control the crowd.

Instead, I suggested, what if the remarks were based around looking at facilitating the protesters, facilitating this democratic right in an effective and safe way? That would be a shift in the culture if, instead of looking at this as a problem—"Someone is protesting. This is a problem. We need to solve this problem. We need to control this crowd"—the approach was, "This is a democratic right. We want to encourage people protesting. We want to encourage people's right to dissent."

How can we facilitate this right in a meaningful way? That would absolutely shift the combative and intense relationship between the police and the protesters, and instead shift it to something that was more positive, that would in fact encourage democracy, that would in fact encourage those protesters and allow it to be facilitated in a way that would be effective, again, also keeping in mind the police's important role of providing safety and security. That's a shift that we need to see.

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If we really want to encourage public participation, it needs to be seen as something that is seen as a valid and important thing. When it comes to what happened in the G20, a lot of the problems arose, again, from the PWWA, the fact that that law was so broad and gave far too many powers. When you have broad powers that are vague, it results in violations.

In addition to that, there's also a problem around the culture. The culture was not one that spoke to facilitating and encouraging the protesters; it spoke to fighting with them, controlling them—this combative discourse. That's what we need to shift.

While this law certainly speaks to protecting people from legal ramifications, it doesn't address the other form of public discourse or public participation, which is protest. We need to talk about that. So I suggest that one particular, concrete action we can take is looking at how we can change policies when it comes to people protesting.

In terms of the provincial government, the Attorney General's ministry can inform police forces across this province and say, "When there is a protest, this is something that should be encouraged. It should be something that's facilitated." How can we do that? Well, we can make sure that there isn't an immediate escalation of the protests by having an approach which is militarized or an approach which is aggressive or an approach which is combative. We can begin by saying that we don't need to approach protesters as a problem; we can step back and be passive in terms of our approach to them.

These can be policy directives that this government can implement. Again, if we are serious about encour-

aging public participation, let's have a policy directive from the government that says that protesting is acceptable, protesting is encouraged, and we want the police to facilitate it. We want the police to have a passive role in terms of protests until there is a clear and identifiable risk, and to only approach those identifiable risks in a manner that's appropriate and proportional to the risk. Instead of assuming the worst and having an aggressive stance right off the bat, we would like to see, and I would like to see, a policy that encourages those protesters by saying, "We can begin the interactions by having a passive approach, an approach which is not combative." That would encourage more discourse.

The reason why I speak to this is, while the laws are important—and laws obviously determine the direction that our province moves in, and laws that protect discourse are, of course, important—we also need to have policy directives. We also need to inform police officers and the police forces across municipalities and across the province in terms of what their direction should be. What should be the appropriate manner in which they deal with citizens?

In addition to that, it also speaks to some of the recent events that we've seen in the past year where there have been some serious concerns around police accountability and the approach that police take to individuals in general. In addition to something that I've requested, which is this directive on encouraging public participation through a policy on how protesters are dealt with, we also need to look at the police strategy around de-escalation of conflicts. Right now, as it stands, the police have a policy which, if you look at recent events, seems to be an escalation strategy. If there is a conflict, if there is a problem, the police come in in a manner which is escalating the conflict, which is escalating the situation, particularly in situations that are already tense.

I refer to the Sammy Yatim tragedy, which is one of the telling situations where the police could have approached that situation in a manner that would have de-escalated the violence. There was a threat. There was certainly a concern. But Mr. Yatim was in a streetcar by himself. There were no other bystanders in that streetcar. The approach taken by the police in that case was not one that looked at de-escalating that situation but instead looked at approaching it in an aggressive manner that escalated the violence. These are areas that we really need to look at.

Again, if we're speaking about public participation, we're speaking about encouraging people and allowing them to participate in democracy. But we also need to look at how the police approach protesters. There needs to be a serious discussion around how the police approach conflict. Instead of looking at strategies which involve the use of force, use of weapons, let's look at the use of de-escalation tactics—the use of negotiation, the use of communication—to take a situation and bring down the tension levels, bring down the stress levels so that we don't see some of the tragedies we've seen in the past year.

When we look at this particular legislation, while I'm encouraged by much of the bill—the recommendations from the SLAPP panel were implemented in a meaningful way in this bill—I also want to speak to some of the problems we still see. One of the major problems that still exist is that if we look at the situation—let's use the example of a community meeting where the community is opposed to a particular development in their neighbourhood. The community members get together and say, “We do not want this development to occur. It will erode the nature or the character of our community, and we don't want it here. We don't want that particular development.” They get together and protest this development, whatever it may be.

As it stands, without this legislation, the developer can say, “Because of this protest, because of these key community activists or community spokespersons who are opposed to our development, we are suffering an economic loss. We are suffering, potentially, because we can't make this building or this store happen. We can't allow it, or it can't be built. Because there is a delay in it being built, it's going to cause us an economic loss.” So a lawsuit is initiated, and its sole purpose is, essentially, to silence that individual.

This bill will protect that incidence, that particular scenario, by saying, “Listen, in those cases where a developer seeks to sue somebody strictly to silence them—there is really no merit to their argument—and, in fact, what that community spokesperson or activist is doing is something we want to encourage; they're participating in public discourse, they're actually speaking about how they want their community to develop, and that's a good thing, this law will allow for a quick mechanism to dismiss those types of lawsuits.”

But what about the letter that's sent? If you don't have legal training, what if that community spokesperson isn't actually sued but they receive a letter, and the letter reads, “You will be taken to court and sued for a substantial sum of money with all the recourse of the law,” and there's legal terminology used in that letter; there is the threat of a lawsuit in that letter? That letter itself is so chilling—it has such a chilling effect; it's so scary to read—that the community spokesperson says, “Listen, I don't want to get sued. I'm going to stop doing what I'm doing. I'm not going to risk a multi-million-dollar lawsuit, because I am just afraid. I have received this letter from a very prestigious law firm or a well-known lawyer, and I'm afraid,” and that person decides not to participate. This bill wouldn't protect that scenario. That letter is something that could silence that individual, could intimidate that individual, and we don't have recourse.

The individual ought to know—if they have legal training, they would know—that simply receiving a letter in the mail isn't an actual lawsuit and isn't going to result in anything. But what does an individual who doesn't have any legal training know about that? The reality is that we need to do more. If we really want to encourage public participation, we need to ensure that people are informed of their rights.

So, in addition to this legislation, I think that one of the areas we need to work on is policy directives for the police to encourage participation in terms of protests, but we also need an informed public. Not only do we need legislation that protects people from being sued in a strategic way to silence them; we also need some concerted effort from the government to educate and inform the people of Ontario that it is something you are allowed to do, and we in fact encourage you to participate in this way.

We want people to speak about their communities. We want people to speak up for a particular development or against it. This is something we want to see happen, and it is your right to organize, to get together as a community and speak about these issues. If you receive a letter that says you are going to be sued, this new legislation will protect you from frivolous lawsuits—lawsuits that are without merit. And if you are engaged in meaningful public participation, that is something we want to encourage and protect; don't be afraid of letters of that sort.

So I think there needs to be an education component to this discussion, this sentiment or this idea of public participation. We have a law that is before us now, which is important, but we also need to have an education component that speaks to informing the public of their rights, of the importance and of our position as legislators; as decision-makers, we want to encourage people. In addition, we need policy directives that actually speak to those who are actually going to enforce the rule of law. We want them to know, those who are involved in police forces, those who are involved in carrying out and enforcing the law—we want them to be informed and to have policy directives that make it clear that we, as Ontarians and Canadians, believe that people should participate in public discourse and debate and have dissent. This is something that's important.

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I want to highlight—and I spoke of this very briefly on a previous occasion—the New Democratic support for this bill. Ontario New Democrats have long believed in protecting public participation. In fact, both in 2008 and 2012, Andrea Horwath, the leader of our party, introduced anti-SLAPP legislation. When Ms. Horwath, the leader of our party, introduced this legislation, we did not receive support from the Liberals at the time, and we want to make it clear that we have supported this issue. We acted on that support by introducing legislation, and we're happy to see now that the Liberal Party has finally caught up with us.

The importance of this bill, again, can't be understated. There have been a number of incidents where people have tried to raise their concerns and have been silenced by lawsuits. I spoke about environmental groups that have raised their concerns and have been silenced by developers. I previously spoke about, and I want to raise again, people who are part of municipalities who have raised concerns around various developments.

In fact, there were a number of people who were concerned about the treatment of animals at a particular

facility, at an amusement park, and while the government has now introduced a law seeming to address this issue, I want to make it clear that people have raised concerns around animal treatment and did not receive any support or protection and, in fact, were hit with significant lawsuits. For example, Mr. Powell of Marineland Animal Defense is right now currently facing a \$1.5-million SLAPP. It was based on his activities raising concerns and information around the treatment of animals. Right now, he is facing this lawsuit.

This is a real issue. People are faced with these lawsuits which discourage them, which intimidate them, which make them unlikely to participate now and in the future as well. We need to make sure that people know that this law is going to be enacted, and when it is enacted, we need to make sure the public is aware of their rights, that they're aware that there may still be lawsuits initiated against them but there is this protection that exists. I think that is so important. Often we have a law, but if that law, first of all, doesn't get enforced, it does nothing. In addition, if we don't know about the strengths of that law, if we don't know there is a law that protects our actions, it doesn't have the same weight.

While this law is supported by all parties, and I'm looking forward to its passage, I want to make sure that we do some work around informing the public of their rights so they know they have this protection. I look forward to a society where we encourage more public participation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm glad to have this opportunity to say a few words based on the comments of the member across the way, from Bramalea-Gore-Malton.

This particular piece of legislation, if I could say, Mr. Speaker, to add to what he has already said, is long overdue. If I could share quickly with all of you, I was a community activist back in 1985. I had a confrontation with the Ministry of Finance on property assessment. The assessor and myself did not agree. And guess what? The government served me one of these letters, saying that I should cease and desist. Had I gone away, market value assessment would not be in place today. I ignored the letter, I pushed ahead and, sure enough, we had market value assessment in 1998. The law was changed. This Legislature agreed with me.

I have to say to you that this particular issue has been outstanding for a long time. It's long overdue. I want to congratulate the government for finally recognizing that we need to stop this because it happens in many areas in community concerns, where someone takes an action because they have a concern in their community and they receive these types of letters from lawyers for developers and all kinds of other issues in communities.

So it's long overdue. I think it's the right direction to go in. There might be some concerns because it's a made-in-Ontario piece of legislation. It's a first of its kind. But when it goes to committee, all of us will have opportunity to discuss it and hopefully improve this piece of legislation.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me that opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Toby Barrett: I always listen attentively to the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton on issues like this. He has a background in the law. His comments are quite appropriate with respect to these kinds of SLAPP lawsuits.

We just heard in this chamber that action on this issue is long overdue, and I do know—I heard a fair bit about the issue of SLAPP lawsuits probably seven years ago. I was environment critic. We were debating the Lake Simcoe Protection Act. Public hearings were held, and a number of people were at the witness table representing an Innisfil ratepayers' group. He was about to speak, and then he looked around furtively. Then he explained to us on the committee that he was subject to a \$1-million lawsuit. He felt maybe he was somewhat protected to be able to stand up at committee and talk about the confrontations—you mentioned confrontations—that they were having, as a ratepayer cottagers' group, with developers. This was up at Big Bay Point. These hearings were being held just a few days after Remembrance Day. Here we had someone at the witness table, very reluctant to present their case because of this lawsuit.

I can empathize with his concern, his fear. I've been involved in confrontation on Caledonia, and I have been named in a lawsuit. This is hard to believe. I've been named in a lawsuit that totals \$226 billion. That's "billion" with a B. Many people think I'm referring to million, but I'm subject to a \$226-billion lawsuit. I don't think this assembly can help me out on this one.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to be able to stand in this House and follow the comments from my colleague from Bramalea-Gore-Malton on Bill 52. Basically, it's anti-SLAPP legislation, and I'm hopefully going to have the opportunity to speak a bit more this afternoon on that issue.

He raised an issue that I hadn't thought about for a long time, and that's the ugly lawyer letter. You know what? I'm sure a lot of us have had those. I can remember when I first got involved with community groups, with farm organizations, and I can remember my first ugly lawyer letter. Basically, unless I complied with this letter, the sky was going to fall in. When you're 22 or 23, you're just starting out with your business and starting out with your family—maybe I was 25; I can't remember. You got this letter, and it's sitting on your kitchen table. You think, "Okay. Do I continue with this battle or do I throw in the towel right now?" How many good fights, worthwhile causes, have been lost because of—and I'm sure there's a nicer word for it, but I call it the ugly lawyer letter?

He brought up a very good point. This legislation—and we support it. It is kind of a touchy subject in parts in my riding. In parts of resource industry places it's a

touchy subject, and I'll get to that in my 20 minutes. But we've supported this legislation from the start, continue to support it, but it doesn't have any impact on the legal professions—you know, the \$1,000 lawyer letter: you pay \$1,000, they send you an ugly letter, and hopefully you go away.

1400

We do need a training session on how to equip people to deal with that, because most of the time, when people get involved in these controversies, they come to it innocently enough, and they have to learn the hard way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: It's a pleasure to have an opportunity to speak about the legislation in front of us today, in particular the remarks made by the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton.

I just want to address one aspect about this bill that has been brought up by some of the opposition members: that the government is moving slowly on this. We just want to reassure the members that we were debating this before May of last year. An election was called at the beginning of May, we went to the polls, and as a result, there was a new mandate—when the election took place on June 12. What happened was, as we all know, any existing legislation that was being debated had to be reintroduced and debated again in this House.

I'm hearing a lot of the same comments that were made in the previous debate before May of last year. I think all three parties support this bill and want it to move on. I'm hopeful that that will happen. I think the government wants this to move forward. The government has been consulting, since the very beginning, with certain groups—the panel—to make sure that the legislation is drafted properly. We've all seen the legislation; it makes a lot of sense. I think it's important to get this to committee and, hopefully, back here for third reading after some changes are made, and eventually into law.

I listened carefully to the member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton when he last spoke on the 5th of March—it was debated that morning. I was rereading some of his comments, and I think they're right in line, pretty well, with what all three parties are saying: We have to fix the system. We have to make sure that people who want to protest against a certain kind of law—if they want to participate in public participation, when someone wants to build something or a developer wants to put something up, they want to be able to speak out, and they don't want to be stopped by a lawyer's letter, or a lawyer writing something and saying, "Dear Mr. Protester: You're going to be sued."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I return to the member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton for his reply.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I think one of the things that's important to address when we talk about this bill is that many of these lawsuits that are launched against individuals that are speaking out often get dismissed in the end. But when's the end? It's years and years of legal battle;

years and years of battle; the case drags out; there is significant cost; there's significant intimidation; there's significant pressure on the individual; and when a judge finally says, "You know what? This case really has no merit. I'm going to dismiss this lawsuit that's been hanging over this individual's head," it's years later.

The effect of the lawsuit is that, during that time period, the individual didn't speak out on it, was silenced, was discouraged from participating because they had this lawsuit hovering over them. What this lawsuit does is—not the fact that people can't be sued frivolously; people will be sued, potentially. What this law will do is that if there's a frivolous lawsuit, if there's a lawsuit strictly designed to silence somebody, there's a mechanism to have that dismissed in a quick fashion. That's really what this bill does, and that's a good thing. That's an important thing.

We have to recognize that, as I've said, many cases have actually been dismissed by judges. They've found that there is really no merit to the lawsuit, but it's taken years. The importance of this bill is that it allows for a quick identification of a case that's frivolous—that's a SLAPP—and will allow for that type of lawsuit to be quickly dismissed so that the individual facing that lawsuit can move on and continue to do what they want to do, which is participate in their community.

I want to thank all the members for sharing their experiences—some members who have also faced these types of lawsuits themselves. It's important to hear their stories because this is a real issue. I'm really encouraged that we have this legislation that will ensure that, at least at some level, we can encourage public participation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? The government House leader and Minister of Community Safety.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Speaker, for recognizing me to speak on Bill 52. I will be sharing my time with the Minister of Transportation and with the member from Etobicoke Centre.

Speaker, I'm very excited to stand again to speak to Bill 52. I've had the opportunity to speak to its predecessor—Bill 83, I believe—which died on the order paper. But my excitement really stems from the fact that this is an issue that I have had the great opportunity to work on for many years now on behalf of my community of Ottawa Centre.

The member from Bramalea-Gore-Malton was right when he suggested that the member from Hamilton Centre did propose a bill, Bill 138, in 2008, but, once it died on the order paper, never re-introduced it. It was a bill which was similar in gist to what we are talking about but had some different elements to it.

I worked along with my community and I have had the opportunity to speak in this House because of certain circumstances some members of my community went through to ensure that we do have robust anti-SLAPP legislation in the province of Ontario. Where I picked up on the work was based on the work of the advisory panel that the Ministry of the Attorney General had created

back in 2010. That advisory panel was made up of some really notable people like Professor Mayo Moran, who is the dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Toronto, along with Brian Rogers of Brian MacLeod Rogers Law Office and Peter Downard of Fasken Martineau. That panel recommended one overarching recommendation, being that Ontario should have anti-SLAPP legislation, but then also provided some very specific recommendations as to what should be in that bill.

In a nutshell, what they said was that anti-SLAPP legislation in the province of Ontario should have a test for courts to quickly recognize a strategic lawsuit, that it should contain appropriate remedies for strategic lawsuits, that it should have appropriate limits to the protection of legislation against strategic lawsuits, and that there should be methods to prevent abuse of any future legislation against strategic lawsuits.

What I did back in 2012 at the behest of my constituents in Ottawa Centre was to take that very thorough work that the advisory panel had done and work hard with the legislative counsel in drafting a piece of legislation that captured the advisory panel's recommendations. I was privileged to table a bill on October 15, 2012, Bill 132, as a sum of that work. The bill was called the Protection of Public Participation Act.

In that journey, I had the great opportunity of working with community associations like the Hintonburg Community Association in my riding and people like Albert Galpin, somebody who was SLAPped and had a strategic lawsuit brought to him because he stood on an issue of public interest. I worked with the federation of community associations and Don Stewart, who is a representative and lives in my riding. He was very instrumental in giving me guidance.

I also had a great opportunity of working with many NGOs, groups like Greenpeace and Environmental Defence and other environmental NGOs who were very instrumental in giving me advice. I do want to give a shout-out to a good friend of mine who is a very good environmental lawyer, Will Amos, part of the Ecojustice legal clinic at the University of Ottawa, who has been a great source of inspiration to me on this particular bill. We were able to table in Bill 132 a real sense of the advisory panel's recommendations because of the work all these people did.

Coming back to my original point, the excitement for me is that when I look at Bill 83, which died on the order paper and which was the first government bill on this very important issue, and now Bill 52, what I see as almost a replication of what I had presented in Bill 132.

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I think it's a very exciting thing to see, when you see government adopting, in essence, all the elements of what you presented in your private member's bill in a government bill. So I want to thank the Attorney General for her confidence in the work that myself, legislative counsel, my staff—I want to give a shout-out to Geoff Turner, who worked very hard on this issue—and all the

community and non-governmental stakeholders that I worked with did, to be able to see their work reflected back.

In my very limited time, I just want to highlight some key things that are important in this bill and that are important to my community. The proposed legislation would implement most of the panel's recommendations, as stated earlier. The key elements of the proposal involve implementing a fast-track review process for potentially strategic litigation under the Courts of Justice Act. This new process would allow the courts to quickly identify and deal with lawsuits that unduly restrict free expression in the public interest, minimizing costs and other hardships endured by the defendant. It will extend qualified privilege in defamation law under the Libel and Slander Act. Currently, statements made by a person with a direct interest in a public interest matter to another person who also has a direct interest are privileged, so they do not give rise to liability for defamation. What the Ministry of the Attorney General is proposing is to extend this privilege to cases where these communications were reported in the media or otherwise, for example, discussed in a blog.

The legislation, if passed, will also make procedural amendments to the Statutory Powers Procedure Act to avoid lengthy and expensive legal cost applications before administrative tribunals. That's a very important point, because we forget that a lot of the matters in our system today are dealt with by quasi-judicial tribunals. They've been created because they're expert tribunals. They bring a certain level of expertise, and proceedings at those tribunals can be used as a matter of strategic lawsuits against public participation. The Ontario Municipal Board comes to mind because of development issues that many, many communities face. So this particular change is extremely important.

Speaker, what this bill really does, and I think all members, as I'm hearing the debate, are speaking to that, is protecting public participation and freedom of expression, which is core to the constitutional rights that have been given to us in this country, and protecting reputation and economic interests. That's the balance of what this legislation tries to do. We need to make sure that we are able, as members of the public and as members of respective communities, to be able to express our views that are important to the public interest and that are important to our communities, but also be able to then protect reputation and economic interests. That balance is very much captured.

That's why one of the key essences around this legislation—and I say this specifically in case people who are listening or paying attention to this issue wonder, "Why do we need legislation like this? Isn't our system already designed in a way that will protect frivolous lawsuits?" When communities and individuals in our communities speak on issues of public interest, that's a different matter. We need to make sure that there are safeguards in place. We should not have a system in place where lawsuits can be brought against those individuals because

somebody, the economic interest or whatever interest, maybe does not like what somebody else is talking about in terms of a particular public interest within the community and uses legal tools—"legal" means the legal system—to shut them down.

What this bill does, if passed—it does not stop somebody from bringing a legal case; it actually creates a fast-track method, an expedited process by which a judge could review whether this is a strategic lawsuit against public participation—when somebody is talking on an issue of public interest, they should be free in an open and democratic society—or if it has merit when it comes to some sort of libel or tort being committed.

In the case of one of my constituents who was SLAPped, and was in the end successful, his success came around two years down the road and it cost him about \$50,000 in legal fees. That's a huge burden on a member of the community who was just talking about an issue that was important to the community and the safety of the community. If something like Bill 52 had existed in law, that matter could have been resolved within 60 days, as outlined in this legislation, and of course you can imagine that the legal costs would have been that much more limited.

Speaker, I will stop here but to say that I'm very excited to see this bill, and I urge all members to support this. I think this will result in stronger communities and it will result in the protection of our rights and the rights of our communities in terms of expressing the public interest.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Etobicoke Centre.

Mr. Yvan Baker: It's a privilege to speak after our government House leader on this important bill.

I'd just like to take a step back and talk a little bit about why I think this is important. When I think about my community of Etobicoke Centre—and I know what I'm going to talk about is probably reflective of what you see in ridings across our province—you have a tremendous number of people who are investing their time, their energy and their resources advocating for their community and making their communities a better place. Most recently, in January, I held an event called the community service awards, where, for people in the community who had been doing good work on behalf of the community, we recognized them with a certificate in appreciation. We recognized them in front of their communities not because they asked for it, not because they wanted it, but because people in the community every day across our province, and Etobicoke Centre is no exception, do wonderful work.

When I think about this bill and how it applies to my community, I think about those folks and I think about how hard they work, how much time they invest—most of it is volunteer time—and the amount of impact that they have on our communities and how fundamental it is that they be able to speak up, that they be able to advocate effectively.

That's what this bill is about, from my perspective. It really goes to that issue. It goes to the issue of protecting

people who are doing great work on behalf of our community; in my case, the community of Etobicoke Centre.

There are many great things about our province, but one of the great things is that we live in a democratic country, and we believe it is important that people can speak out on matters that are important to us. By protecting citizens against frivolous litigation, this bill will allow us to stand up for the values that we hold dear. It will allow us to stand up for those democratic principles that we hold dear.

Using intimidation tactics to silence someone is a misuse of our court system. It's unethical, in my view, but it's also a misuse of our court system. If we pass this legislation, this would allow the courts to quickly identify and deal with strategic lawsuits and minimize not only the emotional strain but also the financial strain on defendants, as well as the waste of court resources.

I think about recent work that members of the community in Etobicoke Centre have done—and they didn't face lawsuits, to my knowledge. I think about the wonderful work that they have done. I think about the residents' associations. One that comes to mind is the Humber Valley Village Residents' Association, which recently worked very, very hard over the course of years and raised a tremendous amount of resources to advocate against a development in our community. I think about the amount of time and resources they put into that.

We need to protect people like that who are speaking out, who are doing their best to do what's good on behalf of our community. Again, this is what this bill is designed to do, and I'm very optimistic that that's exactly what it will do.

This bill was formed after the work of an advisory panel, a very highly qualified advisory panel. I think that's an important thing to consider: that our government was very careful in crafting this legislation. On May 28, 2010, we announced the establishment of an advisory panel to provide advice on legislation against strategic lawsuits. The panel was chaired by professor Mayo Moran, who was dean of the faculty of law at the University of Toronto, along with the Brian MacLeod Rogers law office and Peter Downard of Fasken Martineau.

On December 21, 2010, the advisory panel reported. The panel recommended a number of things: that Ontario should adopt legislation against strategic lawsuits, that the legislation should include a purpose clause for the benefit of judicial interpretation so that it's clear how the court should interpret the law, and a couple of other things that are also important.

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This is something that our government is putting in place, but this is something that has also been implemented in other jurisdictions. Approximately half of US states have statutes against strategic lawsuits, and on June 3, 2009, Quebec passed its own legislation as well.

When I think about this piece of legislation, I think it is one of those things that allow people in their community to do great work on behalf of their community. It

allows them to do that without the fear of emotional strain and financial strain, and it ensures that resources applied to our court system are applied to the area where they are most needed.

We are all here in this Legislature. We all speak up in this Legislature every day on a range of issues because we believe they will strengthen our communities and our province, and improve the quality of life for the people of our province. When I think about my community of Etobicoke Centre, I think about all the people who are doing fantastic work on behalf of our community, and I want to make sure we protect them that they can speak out, that they can advocate and build a better community for all of us.

That's why I think this bill is important, and I encourage all members in this Legislature to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Transportation.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I'm very happy to have the opportunity to stand in the Legislature this afternoon and add my voice, add my remarks, to the debate we have here at second reading of Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act.

I had the opportunity, as we all did this afternoon, to hear the government House leader speak at length and very eloquently about the importance of moving forward with this legislation at second reading. Of course, just before I spoke, the member from Etobicoke Centre added his voice, again talking, I think, in a very articulate way about the importance of making sure that residents of his community of Etobicoke Centre can have the opportunity to participate in public debate, to add their voices to discussion in a balanced way, and to make sure they don't feel that sense of fear about the legal system being used to effectively shut down their participation in that process.

There has been a great deal of work that has gone into the creation of this legislation over a number of years. I know that the member from Etobicoke Centre did reference the work of the panel that was struck to do a very thorough examination and provide feedback with respect to how we should move forward. I think there are a number of individuals—not only those who participated in debate here at second reading, but in particular the government House leader when he served as a back-bencher—who pushed this issue and advocated for it so strongly and so effectively. Of course, both our current and former Attorneys General have contributed a great deal to this entire process.

I know that much has already been said by members on all three sides of the House with respect to the content of the bill. Of course, when I read the bill, when I hear the debate and discussion, and when I read about what the bill includes, the word that comes to me is the concept of balance. I think that's very, very important.

We can't do the work we do as MPPs, and our communities can't thrive and flourish in the way they need to, with all the challenges they face—whether you represent a community on the edge of Toronto, like I do, you're

from a northern community or a rural community in the southwest—when you're growing and you're building and you're prospering, there inevitably will be opportunities for dialogue, opportunities for what I'll call constructive disagreement. I think you'll want a process in place—and that's what this bill strives to achieve—that will help us arrive at that balance, provide those who want to participate in a very genuine, authentic way in the public process with the sense that they can do so, that they can speak their minds, that they can do it in a reasonable way and not fear that the legal system will be used in any way, shape or form as a weapon, I suppose, against their ability to participate in this process.

We wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for the efforts of a number of people on this side of the House—I already mentioned the government House leader; I'll reiterate that. In his time over the last number of years, he has been a persistent and, again, very effective advocate for moving forward with this legislation. I think it's fantastic that we're here at second reading. We've heard a number of individuals speak on this from all three caucuses. It is important that we proceed.

There are people out there facing a number of very difficult and challenging decisions in their community. I know, whether I'm thinking of my own community or others, that there are a number of organizations, grassroots and otherwise, that want to contribute to that process and want the sense that they can do so without putting anything more fundamental at risk. This bill will help accomplish that. It is important for us to pass this bill at second reading, show our support for it and get it through the legislative process so that it can become the law of this province.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: I listened with interest over the last 20 minutes to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the member for Etobicoke Centre and also the Minister of Transportation. You know what, Speaker? Kathleen Wynne is a hypocrite. She is a hypocrite when it comes to this—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): First of all, you can't refer to the Premier by her first name or her surname; she's Premier.

Secondly, that's a very unparliamentary comment. I would ask you to withdraw.

Mr. Steve Clark: I'll withdraw, Speaker.

The Premier says one thing and does something completely different. That's her mode—that's what she does time after time after time. Here we are debating this bill, this bill about public participation, and all I hear are speakers across the way talking about the fact that we need to do something about silencing voices, about intimidation. This is a government that has its own SLAPP suit against the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook and the member for Nepean—Carleton.

So the Premier says, in her throne speech, that she's going to let the justice committee do its report, but she

ensures that Peter Faist and Laura Miller don't testify. She ensures that other witnesses like Monique Smith or Beckie Codd-Downey—the list goes on and on and on.

We're never going to get to the truth of this case. Yet the Premier, again, says one thing, does something completely different, doesn't drop the suit and continues to try to silence the opposition, when she has silenced the whole debate by shutting the committee down. Again, she says one thing and does something completely different. I'm sick and tired of listening to the Liberals stand up with this holier-than-thou, self-righteous attitude when, if they really wanted to do something, they should drop that suit against those two members, and we should have this committee hear those witnesses and get to the bottom of the gas plant scandal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It's a privilege for me to rise on behalf of the people I represent in London West to respond to some of the comments that were made by the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, the MPP from Etobicoke Centre and the Minister of Transportation about Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act. This legislation has been discussed in this Legislature for many years. It's great to see, finally, that it is moving forward, and I want to congratulate the government for doing that.

I wasn't here in this Legislature when the bill was first debated, when it was brought forward as a private member's legislation by our leader, Andrea Horwath, back in 2008 and back in 2012, but I was here when it was introduced in the last session. It was one of the first pieces of legislation that I had the opportunity to speak to as a newly elected member of the Legislature.

I didn't really expect that it would resonate the way that it did with the constituents I represent in London West. London West has not had experiences, necessarily, with SLAPP lawsuits, but people in London recognize the importance of this kind of legislation to ensure free speech, to respect and protect the rights of citizens to engage in the democratic process and to voice their opinions about issues that matter to them in their community. In London, we see developments and we see people who are concerned about the impact on the environment. This legislation is desperately needed to enable those people to voice their concerns.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Han Dong: First of all, I recognize my colleague across, the member from Leeds–Grenville, for his ability to connect this anti-SLAPP protection for public participation bill to something political, you know, that has been debated in this House previously—

Interjections.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Before this gets out of hand, I would remind the member that his question or comment is to go back to one of the three government members who made the 20-minute speech.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It's not to be a question and comment related to another question and comment.

The member for Trinity–Spadina has the floor.

Mr. Han Dong: I said I might—but that's okay. I want to speak to the bill and respond to the minister's comments.

In essence, I think this bill is to provide fairness and protect the small guys and also to preserve the democratic rights that we enjoy in this country. I'm thinking about the local—it could be a local environmental activist or a senior who is questioning how the property will be affected by a project nearby. Their rights need to be protected.

I also think about the intention of strategic lawsuits. I can't help but, in my mind, assume that it has to do with hiding some facts. Maybe it's too costly to address some of the concerns. This bill, if passed, will encourage more interaction between the big guys and the little guys and more communication and, through that, maybe there are some creative and constructive suggestions that would be beneficial for the big corporations. In the long run, I think it's good for the community and it's good for the business environment.

The other thing that I fully support is the balance. It would strike the right balance, if passed, between—and let the court make a decision whether it's a strategic lawsuit or not.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm going to pick up where my colleague from Leeds–Grenville left off. It's very interesting that this supposed law is going to allow for fairness and the little guy to be represented and have a say, and yet it says one thing but does the other. So the Premier, again, has denied the ability for Laura Miller and Peter Faist to come forward and actually testify and give the true truth that the people of Ontario so truly deserve—and yet hide behind this and yet comes out with this type of legislation.

It's intimidating and silencing. She has a \$2-million lawsuit against two members of our caucus, Mr. Speaker—the height of saying one thing and doing the other. It's convenient for her when it works for her, but yet no one else should have the same abilities.

The Green Energy Act that this government brought in, that again denies local, municipally elected officials to have a say in their own backyard—there are lawsuits out there now that are trying, I believe, to scare the small, independent person who has a concern with this and the health of their family and themselves and their communities to be able to do it. They have removed those democratic rights. They have intimidated, by putting those types of things in.

I'm going to spend a fair bit of time in my presentation later giving some specific arguments, situations and proposals in regard to what I believe this is. It is, I believe, a step in the right direction. The challenge I

have—and my colleague did say it. I'm not going to use the word, but it really is the height of saying one thing and doing another, using it for your own benefit and trying to come across that this is for everybody.

At the end of the day, hopefully she will find it in her heart, the Premier, to drop this \$2-million lawsuit so that she can't silence two people from my caucus. Hopefully, she'll come forward at some point and allow Laura Miller and Peter Faist to actually be brought in front of people to answer the questions that Ontarians so truly deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments.

The government House leader has two minutes to reply.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Transportation and the member from Etobicoke Centre for their comments and also the members from Leeds–Grenville, London West, Trinity–Spadina and Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound for their comments.

It's unfortunate, Speaker, that the official opposition trivialized the importance of this legislation by taking political jabs. They're entitled to it, and I won't begrudge them.

But I will go back to my community because that's where I get my marching orders. I can tell you that when I talk to members of the community and various community associations in Glebe, Hintonburg, Mechanicsville, Carleton Heights, Carlington, Westboro—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Hog's Back.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: You mention Hog's Back. When I look at all these communities that are so active—these are volunteers in my community who work with all of these different community associations day in and day out. They have only one focus and one focus only, Speaker, and that is to make sure that our neighbourhoods are better neighbourhoods to live in. They do a lot of activities. We all will know the bake sales that community associations host, just so they can do things that make their communities better.

Through this legislation, Bill 52, we want to make sure that somebody else who has a bigger interest, a powerful interest, is not able to use their might and silence these community groups, these hard-working volunteers in our neighbourhoods, from improving things, the quality of life. That is why I was so motivated to work with my constituents in drafting a very significant piece of legislation—a very significant piece of public policy—and with the help of many members from all three sides, to convince the government that this is worth being a government initiative. I'm really excited to see that it is, and I urge all members to support Bill 52.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? The member for Perth–Wellington.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. I have listened; it has been quite an interesting afternoon with this debate. I find some of the comments interesting—I'll put it that way—as to what has happened with the previous speakers.

Certainly, when it comes to openness and transparency with this government, I think that somebody should—maybe we could do this—look up the dictionary definitions of “openness” and “transparency” and send them across to the Premier so that she understands what they are.

Anyway, Speaker, the purposes of this—

Interjections.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I didn't hear what he said, anyway.

The purposes of this, in sections 137.2 to 137.5, are:

“(a) to encourage individuals to express themselves on matters of public interest;

“(b) to promote broad participation in debates on matters of public interest;

“(c) to discourage the use of litigation as a means of unduly limiting expression on matters of public interest; and

“(d) to reduce the risk that participation by the public in debates on matters of public interest will be hampered by fear of litigation.”

Speaker, this is a bill that has some high aspirational points it wants to bring forth and change what they call SLAPP legislation, so that people aren't intimidated by these lawsuits. A SLAPP is a lawsuit that is pursued for the sole purpose of soliciting and punishing those with an opposing viewpoint. The effect is also sometimes referred to as litigation chill.

Speaker, there are other pieces of legislation that people are getting a little bit upset with, too, and litigation chill is what it actually is, and that's with joint and several liability. This government refuses—200-and-some municipalities asked them to help them change joint and several liability. Last year at AMO, I was there when this minister—the Attorney General who we thought was going to work with these 200-and-some municipalities—said, “No, we're not doing anything. We're not doing anything.” So, now communities, including my own, are faced with what they call litigation chill.

This year, we saw some municipalities shutting down toboggan runs for kids—shutting them down. In my own municipality, they have taken out diving boards and different things because they're afraid of being sued, which is similar to what this legislation tries to address: a fear of being sued with these huge lawsuits.

Part of what defines a SLAPP is the fact that it is a meritless case that is intended more to intimidate or punish the defendant rather than seek justice for a wrong suffered by the plaintiff. Speaker, that gets right back to my previous points here about joint and several liability. It's a threat. It is a threat, and it's causing premiums to skyrocket for municipalities. The insurance companies have to try to justify their rates. How do you justify these things? How can you justify these things when you don't know just where it's going to go?

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Insurance companies—municipalities asked for some help here, and this government ignored them. We believe

the reason they were ignored is because the only ones they listened to, in the FOI documents that we were able to get on this subject, were four or five lawyers' groups. That's all they listened to. Of course a lawyers' group is going to say, "Don't touch this," because in effect you're fooling around with their income. So it's interesting that they bring this legislation back to the House, because it did die before, when they won't listen to things like I have just been talking about.

Speaker, I am certainly not a lawyer, and there are things that I do want to question about this bill. In the SLAPP legislation as it is right now, what I wonder about and what I think about is a case that happened in my riding a number of years ago. There was no lawsuit over it, but people were afraid to say anything, so maybe it pertains to this.

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, at the landfill site in the township that I still live in, Boy Scouts decided to plant trees around it. The trees were made to kind of beautify the landfill site, and they did. They planted native species. What it did was hide the garbage that was put in there. The other thing it did is that it stopped garbage from being blown out of the dump. We called it a dump back then; I guess you'd call it a landfill now. You could look at this bush, or forest, I guess, if you want to call it that—native species; there's ash planted and different types of evergreen trees—and you could see in there how it would catch these bags, especially plastic bags, which we all know are something that is being addressed; there are some plastic bags that will decompose over a certain period of time. But you could see them in the trees. Most of the bush was planted on the south side of the landfill site and around to the west and north, because our prevailing winds pretty much come in that direction.

When I was a councillor in the municipality of North Perth, where this landfill is, the landfill had to be re-designed. So we did a study, and they brought back what this landfill needed to do in order to come up to standards as prescribed by the government. One of the things that had to be done was that all these trees were ripped out. They ripped them all out.

The Scout leader who at the time had led this tree planting saw that this was happening. These trees by this time were about this big around, probably 30 feet high, something like that. He saw what was happening and said, "What are we going to do about this?" He said, "These guys"—Scouts at that time; they'll be in their 30s and 40s now—"are pretty upset because they worked quite hard at putting this in. It was a project of Boy Scouts at that time, and now it's going."

They were afraid to say anything. I don't know whether it was because of this, having a SLAPP lawsuit put on them, but I just wonder if that is something that could have been done, whether the contractor who was doing the work in the landfill—if the Scouts had come along and protested, whether they could have had a lawsuit slapped on them. They chose not to say anything. They didn't want to get involved with courts and they let it go.

When they got done clearing that bush, those trees, out—perhaps they were maybe planted in the wrong place; I don't know the whole story to it—there were logging trucks coming in there, day after day after day, taking these trees. They bulldozed the stumps out, they piled them up in a huge pile in the landfill and they brought in a big grinder and they ground them all down, as they did all the brush.

If you talked to this Scout leader, he was pretty upset. It was a pretty sad story on his part, anyway. But again, hopefully this type of legislation that is being proposed by the Attorney General will change some of this, where someone can get up and say, "Whoa. Let's stop this for a minute and let's talk about it," and the judges will certainly have discretion to say whether it's frivolous or not.

Speaker, another thing I want to talk about—I didn't know much about this until the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane spoke about it the last time we debated this bill—was his involvement with SLAPP lawsuits. That's terrifying, simply terrifying, what they did. As I recall, it was with a municipal land site, and as I recall, because people in the country are good folks—as there are good folks in the city, and all over Ontario—they got together and helped them out, both financially and with encouragement, so that he was able to stay with this thing, or his group was able to stay with this thing and fight it.

Because that's the issue. If somebody came to me and said, "I'm going to sue you for a couple of million dollars," even if I won the lawsuit at the end, what am I going to pay my lawyer with? It's very expensive. It's really expensive, and that's what keeps people saying, "Oh, we give up." This type of thing, the way it is now, allows that to be happening and allows that money to be spent, because you've got to keep fooling around with it.

As I understand the legislation, the judge will have some latitude. He can say, "Look, this is frivolous. We're not going to do this," and that's the end of the story. I like that part of it. I think, too, that we have to be careful; maybe, if it gets to committee, we can look at the parts of it that companies do have issues with. I've heard stories in the forestry industry that there are some issues with this legislation, because groups can move in to stop a forestry project, and this was one way they had to stop doing that—although it maybe needs to be changed a little bit to suit both sides of the equation.

The other part of what I wanted to speak about today, if I could find my notes—there we go. Speaker, I had quite a weekend. Paddyfest was in Listowel—it's been going on for two weeks—and also a Lions convention in Stratford that went on all weekend. I was at both for quite a bit of the time. There was an event—I will link it up to this business here. I went to the Presbyterian church on Saturday, flipped pancakes for three hours and fed the multitude. The Presbyterian church, in case you're ever interested, only charges five bucks for pancakes and sausage with maple syrup and the whole deal. It's very inexpensive. A lot of people could come in and enjoy this.

Anyway, when I got thinking about this joint and several liability—the Presbyterian church has done very well with modernizing their kitchen and whatever else to try to come up to standards, but then they have a bunch of volunteers in there who probably haven't studied the book as to procedures and whatever else.

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Now, I've been doing this for a lot of years; I've never been sick. None of the people who have come in have ever been sick. But yet, we have rules and regulations that say, "Well, you could get sick," and ta-da, da-da, da-da. And it costs people a lot of money.

Interjection.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Well, whatever. It costs people a lot of money to do these things. But I would suppose, and this may be way far out there, that if someone wanted to stop this process, stop this church group or even stop Paddyfest, they'd say, "We're protesting against the good people of Ireland and their ancestors," which I can't see happening, because on March 17 everybody wants to be Irish. I know that for a fact. If you saw the parade, you saw that everybody dressed up in green ties and hats. But I suppose if somebody was protesting something that happened in Ireland back a number of years ago, they could probably surround that church and stop the thing. So what would the church have to do? Call a lawyer and do a SLAPP? I don't know. Is that the recourse? I don't know.

I think we need to be careful how this legislation is drawn up and certainly safeguard some of the people that could be involved in these lawsuits.

I've been involved with service work for a long time. I joined the Lions Club in 1987. We had a number of events that we had been carrying on for years that we had to stop because of legal business. It didn't hurt anybody. It made us some money. But when we got to insurance costs and we got to legal business, we decided to give them up because we didn't want to get involved in things, maybe in a lawsuit here and there. I think that's probably where our lawsuit business has gone. It's gotten so big and so huge that the ordinary person and the ordinary group just backs off and says nothing about it. That's really too bad.

We used to have—I don't know—for 40-some years in Moncton we used to have what they called a turkey shoot. It went on for years. People would come out and they'd shoot at targets. They wouldn't shoot at turkeys, but the prize was a turkey. That's the way it worked. The Moncton Lions had this on for years, and it was a very successful event. Then the rules about guns started changing. You'd get the odd person—you'd hear a whisper or two: "If somebody gets hurt here," all this stuff. So we quit; we quit this thing.

The other thing that we used to do is we had a tractor pull. We had it for three or four years and built it up to a pretty big event. We quit that one too because of liability reasons. We were afraid of these lawsuits, and you couldn't buy insurance big enough to cover these things. In fact, some insurance companies wouldn't cover them,

period. That's all there was to it. So we quit these things. That's what this SLAPP legislation and legislation like it has done to, certainly, small communities. I can imagine what it could do to communities all around Ontario.

We stand by the rights of individuals to express their opinions, especially on matters of public interest. The reality is that while SLAPPs, as they are known, are relatively rare, when they do appear or occur, as we've heard, they can ruin people's lives. We do not think it is appropriate for residents to fear having a voice in the growth of their communities.

Moreover, these SLAPPs are, by definition, unfounded and stand little chance of succeeding—that's the interesting part, Speaker; they have little chance of succeeding—so they needlessly bog down Ontario's court system. Bill 52 does try to address this, so that's a good part of the bill.

In my time left, I will give a bit of a wrap-up to this.

The bill establishes a formal legal process for assessing suits to determine if they are SLAPPs, and disposing of them if so. That's a part of the bill that I think really has to be in there and should be worded very strongly so that our justice system can address it if it happens. In essence, Bill 52 establishes a framework that allows an individual to determine if a lawsuit brought against them is a SLAPP or not within a 60-day time frame—again, another good part of this bill.

Thank you, Speaker, for allowing me to speak. I'll be interested in the comments that come afterwards.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: It's always great to continue with the debate. Again, I want to reiterate the fact that New Democrats certainly support protecting public participation. We've given examples. Many people in our caucus have examples of folks who have been SLAPPED, who have been silenced because of their public participation, and that's not what we want to see. We're very committed to the principle that people need to be able to participate in this democracy; that's without doubt. I think it's quite ironic that the government that has brought forward this bill currently has lawsuits against people for participation, participating in public discourse. That is quite ironic and that's something that was brought up in today's debate. I think it's somewhat troubling if a bill that's proposed is seeking to protect public participation and the very same government is actually discouraging public participation. It's quite ironic and I think it's something we need to look at. But it's certainly a bill that we support; it's certainly something that we need to see in terms of protection. It's something we need to see implemented quickly.

There's also one additional piece that I want to highlight. Initially, when this bill was introduced, there was a retroactive clause so that people currently facing lawsuits could make use of this new protection. I'm curious whether or not the government could answer this question: Is this retroactive clause no longer a part of the legislation? I understand that now there isn't the retro-

active clause, so that the existing lawsuits that people are faced with wouldn't actually have the protection of this piece of legislation. That's very concerning. There are people right now faced with serious lawsuits, and if they are not being protected by this legislation, this government is not really doing a good job in protecting public participation. So we really need to look at that. If that's not here, why was that removed and why aren't we protecting those people who are facing lawsuits?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I'm pleased to stand today and speak about the bill for protection of public participation, Bill 52. Also, I want to acknowledge the members from Perth–Wellington and Bramalea–Gore–Malton, who spoke earlier.

This is a very important bill because it aims to protect a very important principle; namely, freedom of speech. We all in this House are really lucky, because every day we get to stand up in the House and be the voices of our communities and our ridings. In fact, I think it's really noteworthy that today I'm wearing jewellery that was made by some people from South Africa, people who understand what it's like to not be able to speak out and to not be able to have freedom of speech in their history.

I can tell you that many people in my riding of Halton have spoken out loudly and clearly about this bill. I have spoken to people who say they have been unfairly sued, people who say that they are suffering from emotional and mental stress because of these lawsuits. And they are saying to me that they're really pleased that we're moving forward with Bill 52. People need to have a voice when they are facing challenges, and people should not be afraid to make their opinions known because of strategic litigations designed to silence them. This is essentially a form of intimidation. Tactics to silence people are a misuse of our court system, and it is also costly and unfair. It is also unacceptable and undemocratic.

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We need to work together in this House to make sure that this bill moves forward. This is about something that is intrinsic to this House: allowing people to have a voice when they need to be able to speak out about something. If passed, this bill will allow our courts to move quickly and identify strategic lawsuits. I think this proposed bill is an extremely important attempt to protect our democracy, and I think it is noteworthy that the people here standing up today get to have their say whether they like what we're doing or they don't, because this is what our democracy is all about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have an opportunity to respond to the speech from the member from Perth–Wellington on Bill 52.

I noted that in his speech he did talk briefly about the forestry industry and some concerns that they have raised. I know that many of the members are speaking positively about this bill. I would just like to raise some

concerns and say, "Hold on. Not quite so fast." I worry about unintended consequences of this bill.

I note that the Ontario Forest Industries Association is really concerned with Bill 52. In fact, they've written to the government, written to the minister. They say, "In its present form, Bill 52 is a direct attack on the job creators in this province and the 170,000 Ontario citizens who work directly and indirectly for Ontario's renewable natural forest products sector." They've gone through the whole bill and have made some criticisms and some suggestions for improvement, so I really hope the government looks in detail at their suggestions. They have four areas of concern: the public interest concept and how vague that definition is; they talk about proper onus; they talk about the costs sanctions and due process.

They are raising concerns because of what they have seen of organizations like Greenpeace targeting Ontario-based companies that are working in the forestry sector under the Crown Forest Sustainability Act in a very sustainable way, but attacking Ontario products.

They note, "We recently witnessed how a well-financed radical organization embarked on a malicious campaign filled with gross misinformation intended to damage the market for forest products sourced from Canada's boreal forest. We have shared with you Greenpeace emails in which they direct their volunteers to 'Write a false product review on Best Buy's website. Be creative, and make sure to weave in the campaign issues!'" I would go on, Mr. Speaker, to say that that campaign was successful.

I worry that they're raising some very valid concerns with regard to Bill 52.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: It is an honour for me to rise on behalf of the people I represent in London West to respond to the comments that were offered by the member for Perth–Wellington on Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act.

At the outset, I want to reiterate the support that has been expressed for this legislation by members in the New Democratic caucus. Certainly, it is something that we welcome. It's something that New Democrats have been advocating for years, beginning with the private members' bills that were brought forward by our leader in 2008 and again in 2012.

With this legislation, essentially Ontario is catching up. We are catching up with Quebec and we are catching up with most US states, because those jurisdictions recognize the importance of having this kind of legislation to protect our democracy. Anti-SLAPP legislation is fundamental to encouraging democratic debate and participation, and engagement in public decision-making.

I want to raise a couple of concerns and echo a little bit of what was mentioned by my colleague the member for Bramalea–Gore–Malton. That is around the retroactivity or lack of retroactivity of this legislation, which is something that we definitely need to look at as this legislation moves forward—and also the need for a

public awareness campaign to make sure that citizens recognize their rights to participate in public discussions about issues affecting the environment and development. Both of those things should be looked at in committee, and I welcome this bill moving forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's it for questions and comments. I return to the member for Perth—Wellington for his reply.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'd like to thank the members from Bramalea—Gore—Malton, Halton, Parry Sound—Muskoka and London West for their comments about what I had to say.

When I was first elected, I had a resolution passed in this Legislature. What it basically said was that before government introduces legislation and passes it, think about what it is going to do to the people it affects—it's a very simple principle—and I got all-party support on that, Speaker. You know, that was pretty interesting to me, anyway, my first time up. Unfortunately, we've seen that not happen here on different items.

This bill, if it is supported, has some good points to it. But I just wonder where the government is going with it, or even if they're interested in passing it because of things that are going on right now in this province. Like was mentioned, we still have a lawsuit against two members of our party, trying to make them be quiet about things that have happened in the past. We see all these investigations going on—four OPP investigations, I believe, right now. And yet the Premier, will not, in our opinion, do the right thing and make two of her staff—or one staff and one party worker—back away or step down until the investigation is over with.

So, they appear to want to be accountable to people, and yet their actions do not speak as loud as their words.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John Vanthof: C'est toujours un honneur de me lever ici pour parler, surtout sur le projet de loi 52, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les tribunaux judiciaires, la Loi sur la diffamation et la Loi sur l'exercice des compétences légales afin de protéger l'expression sur les affaires d'intérêt public.

The next 19 minutes will be in English—*Laughter.*

Mr. John Vanthof: —but I'm trying.

This is a very important bill, and we do support the principle of anti-SLAPP legislation, very much so. But there are concerns, specifically in the forestry sector and in ridings that depend on forestry. Specifically, I will mention that the OFIA and the companies they represent are extremely worried that well-funded environmental organizations could misuse this legislation to create a catastrophe in the forest sector. Some of my mayors have expressed the same concern.

I do think that if this bill passes and goes to committee, we are going to have to be very, very cognizant of those concerns. Personally, and from my personal experience, I believe that this legislation is needed, because one thing I disagree with vehemently, and I've expressed this

to the OFIA—in a meeting I had with the OFIA, they told me that a SLAPP suit has never really been used in Ontario, so we don't need this legislation. That's wrong. That's not true. I know that's not true, because in a few minutes, I'll relate my personal experience. Why I'm actually standing here in this Legislature is the result of a SLAPP suit.

But just to go back to the OFIA and the forestry sector: Specifically, I lost the mill in my riding, and one of the reasons that the company gave was a result of their market being hurt by malicious statements made by environmental organizations.

As long as the legislation is crafted correctly, companies could also use this legislation, because if a malicious suit, without base, was put out against the company, the same legislation—within 60 days, the company could put their case forward and if that suit was malicious, without base, theoretically, if the legislation is crafted correctly—

Mr. Norm Miller: Theoretically.

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Mr. John Vanthof: Theoretically, but this is a debate about making laws.

If the time and effort is put into this legislation to actually reflect everyone, I think the principle of this legislation is valid.

Why we've always believed anti-SLAPP legislation is needed—and this is the second time I believe I've made this speech in this Legislature, but here we go again. In my riding, about 20 years ago, the city of Toronto was looking for a place to dump their garbage. The place that was picked was an abandoned open-pit iron-ore mine in my riding, Adams mine.

At the time, I had no interest in this issue at all. I was milking my cows, running my farm, and I happened to be a member of the federation of agriculture. I went to an open house in my local town. The city of Toronto had a lawyer representing them and the lawyer said something that sparked my interest. I told the federation and, lo and behold, I ended up representing the Temiskaming Federation of Agriculture on the public liaison committee for the city of Toronto.

Our only concern was that our water not be impacted by this project. Because—you know what?—farmers run businesses and we don't have a right to impact others, but in return, they shouldn't have the right to impact us. Officially, we have never been against this project. We still aren't. We have never said we're against this project. We just want it to work.

This project was on and off and on and off. About 10 years later, it wasn't the city of Toronto, it was the government of Ontario, with some private corporations who were really pushing this—under the Harris government. We were told originally that this project was going to work because the water going in the site was going to keep the leachate from going out. It makes sense. If you have a big bucket and you take a little bucket with some holes and you put the little bucket in the big bucket, the water in the big bucket is going to go into the little one. It makes sense.

Ten years later, we thought, okay, if that's the case, let's go measure the water in the site. We went once a month, a buddy of mine and myself, and we measured that water. In a year, that water never moved. So you've got a 65-acre pit with 300 feet of groundwater in it, and we were told by the hydrogeological experts at the time that if that pit wasn't pumped and filled with garbage, eventually it would overflow. But in a year, the water never moved. By that time that pit was fully accredited by the Ministry of the Environment. It had its licence to become a dump.

So with the help of my friend from Timmins—James Bay—I had never actually been in this building. He organized a press conference in the press gallery here, at the press booth. My friend and I stated that we had gone to measure the water and we thought that the licence was issued under false pretenses, and we believed that the licence should be removed. We were promptly sued for \$10 million. I was personally sued for \$10 million.

At the time, I would have been more concerned if I had been sued for \$100,000 because maybe I could have borrowed \$100,000. But \$10 million was just out of the realm. But at that time, the way I envision this legislation, I made a claim that was unsubstantiated. I had gone and measured the water, but I had made a claim that was unsubstantiated. I don't think, when the company sued at that point, that it was a SLAPP suit, because I had made an unsubstantiated claim.

But at the same time, we'd also looked for someone who would do a critical analysis of the MOE's approval. A "critical analysis," I learned during that time, is a very scientific term and there are only a few people qualified or willing to do a critical analysis of MOE's approvals.

One of them—and I'm going to give a plug where a plug is due. The man's name is Ken Howard and he's a professor of hydrogeology at the University of Toronto. He had a lot to do with Justice O'Connor's inquiry into the Walkerton crisis. He agreed to do a critical analysis at the same time of the MOE's work—not of our work; of the MOE's work—and he came out with a report saying that we might not be right, but the ministry certainly couldn't prove that it was going to work either.

Then the \$10-million suit against me and against the federation of agriculture—at that point it became a SLAPP suit, because we had a substantiated case. By then Mr. McGuinty was Premier, and during the machinations of how government works, there was a law passed in this very House, the Adams Mine Lake Act, that it's against the law to pump out Adams mine.

But they never took the licence. They took Ken Howard's report and everybody ran like crazy, basically. Because Dr. Howard laid out a five-point plan on how you could, over three years, prove whether Adams mine was going to work or not, and nobody wanted to prove it, even though it had been fully approved by the Ministry of the Environment—this Ministry of the Environment.

So the Adams Mine Lake Act was proclaimed. Everyone was very happy. Actually, the first time I knew about committee hearings, there was a committee hearing held

just outside of Toronto here and I spoke for the first time. I spoke against the Adams Mine Lake Act, actually, on behalf of the federation of agriculture, because I wanted to know how you could have what would be the biggest landfill in North America, how you could approve that, and then change your mind and not look at how it got approved in the first place. To me that was a little detail, because this was, at the time, going to be the biggest landfill in North America. Lo and behold, they decided, "Ooh, that's not as sure a thing as we thought," but this government never really looked at why it was approved in the first place.

Getting back to the SLAPP suit, the Adams Mine Lake Act was proclaimed, and because of the Adams Mine Lake Act, the way it was set up, they took away the right of the investors and the owners of Adams mine to use their fully licensed pit. So they all got paid. Do you know by who? By the taxpayers of Ontario. Because the government said, "No. You have a licensed pit, but you're not allowed to use it." So they all got paid by the taxpayers.

But the federation of agriculture and myself—the lawsuit never stopped. The company never dropped the \$10-million lawsuit. And what happens when you're a small business and you have a big lawsuit like that? The bank was really worried because at that time I probably owed half a million dollars, which isn't a lot on a farm, but I owed half a million dollars. The bank doesn't want to lend you any money.

We had insurance. We had anti—I forget what it's called. It's insurance when you're a director of an organization, so if you get sued—do you know who the toughest people are? The insurance company, because they get on your back so bad. The company said all I had to do was recant, go on local TV and say that I was wrong—"No, Adams Mine was going to work"—and they would drop the lawsuit. Well, I wouldn't, because we weren't wrong. I spent a lot of time on the phone with lawyers from my insurance company who wanted me to back down. The only way that I got out of that lawsuit is, I decided to run against the sitting MPP.

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Mr. Percy Hatfield: How did that work out for you, John?

Mr. John Vanthof: It didn't work out so good the first time.

But the truth is, the only way we could see of getting out of that lawsuit is being able to go on the campaign hustings and hammer the government, saying, "Okay. So you're taking credit for stopping this, but how come the people who really stopped it are getting sued, and you're not doing anything?"

Lo and behold—I was gearing up for that; that was going to be fun; I would have enjoyed that—four days before the writ was dropped, guess what happened? They dropped the lawsuit four days before the writ was dropped.

For years, my family—did we starve? No. But did our farm flourish when we couldn't borrow money? There

were times when the only way I got my seeding is when the neighbours came over and helped.

So when someone from the OFIA or from anywhere else tells me that, "Oh, no. We don't need this legislation in Ontario," I don't buy that. Because if it happened to me, and we hear other people who it happened to, we need this legislation.

Again, we have to be very cognizant that this legislation can't be misused—as any legislation. Right now, people are using the legal system—they're misusing it to stop public participation. The idea, the principle behind Bill 52, hopefully, is to stop that misuse. But what we've got to be very cognizant of is, when you create a different type of legislation, you have got to be very cognizant that it, too, could be misused. I think we always have to be mindful of that.

Something we have to be very, very mindful of is that while we sit here and talk about legislation and wherever this legislation is drafted, in the halls around this lofty building here, that the legislation that we draft here actually works on the ground in the country.

I'll give you an example of how some legislation doesn't. One of my colleagues here spoke about the Green Energy Act. One of the things that bothers me about the Green Energy Act is that when it was created, it superseded most other acts in the province because this government wanted to kick-start green energy. So, basically, solar panels and windmills started popping up in places where you would never be able to build other things. That is happening right now in my riding.

Timiskaming, the centre part of my riding, is one of the best places for agriculture in northern Ontario. It is equivalent to most places in southern Ontario. Yet there is no classification for the land. So while this government, in their mandate letter to the Minister of Agriculture, said that we have to develop northern Ontario, that that's the future of agriculture, in Timiskaming right now, they are covering it with solar panels—the best land in northern Ontario. What makes that even more insulting, Speaker, because of our sparse population, and because most people have no access to natural gas in the country, so people watch solar panels sprout up around them, and these same people, many who are on fixed incomes—worked hard, own their own houses—never thought that the price of electricity would go through the roof. So these people watched solar panels being built in front of them, and they don't know how to pay their hydro bills. That is the ultimate travesty, and it's happening as we speak here. We have no control, as we speak. Solar panels are going up on the best farmland in northern Ontario. Do you know what? The Premier says that the future of agriculture in Ontario is northern Ontario. Well, you're covering the best stuff up with solar panels, and that's because of the Green Energy Act. It must have sounded like a good idea here at the time, but you never thought out whether it was actually going to work beyond these walls, beyond these cities. With any legislation, we have to do a much better job at that, including this legislation.

At first read, this is a good idea, but we really have to be careful to make sure that we check the flaws. On top of that, Speaker, one thing that this government is extremely guilty of—I've only had experience looking at this government, but for a government to make mistakes? That's not the worst thing. But not being willing to look objectively and correct them? That is close to a crime. When they know the problems that are happening with the Green Energy Act—they know that and yet they forge ahead. They turn the other way.

I look at my riding. We've got big solar projects where the contractors don't get paid. This happens time and time again. They know this is happening, yet they don't act. They talk about strategic lawsuits, and they use them themselves. Again, we have to make sure that when we make laws or criticize laws, we actually develop legislation that is going to work in the province, not just in these halls.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I want to thank the member for Timiskaming—Cochrane for his remarks and his experience as a citizen of challenging a government decision, challenging a private company that was pursuing an idea. His personal experience of being slapped with a lawsuit for standing up for his rights and for his community's rights is the perfect example of why Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act, is such an important piece of legislation. That type of incident that the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane experienced has been experienced by many other residents of Ontario, perhaps in some instances not as significant as that one, but in many smaller ones.

The government has made some changes to the proposed legislation from what was before the House before, and it has followed the recommendations of an expert panel, with one significant difference: that this bill does not recommend, as the panel did, the automatic ability to get awards of costs at certain administrative tribunals. Lawyers were consulted and felt that that was too inflexible and not a fair application of law. So to the member's comments about trying to get the legislation right, there's been a great deal of thought put into this bill to get it right.

The ultimate test of whether this bill is going to function properly is that we are a nation, a province, of laws. No government can simply make administrative decisions about whether lawsuits are fair or not; that is up to judges, in courts of law. People can have representation in those courts of law, and there are appeal mechanisms against a decision that somebody disagrees with, even under this legislation. So I think that the checks and balances are there, Mr. Speaker.

1530

I know in my own community there was a resident who fought a developer over a development application because he felt the development was going on crown land. The person opposing the developer proved that the development cannot go ahead because it's on crown land,

on the waterfront, yet they faced tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees from a SLAPP suit. So they won, but they lost. This legislation would prevent that for the residents of Etobicoke–Lakeshore and for the residents throughout Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act, 2014, and of course to bring comments to the presentation made by my colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane. I always enjoy hearing him because he's a very pragmatic, down-to-earth person who typically brings a personal story. I certainly would have liked to have been able to hear some of those conversations when those insurers were trying to talk him into changing his mind. I would have liked to have been part of that conversation and hear a bit more about that, Mr. Speaker. I think his constituents are the luckier for it, that he stayed firm to his convictions, and if that was the reason he ran and is here today, then I guess there's some good that came out of that.

One of the key things that he brought up is that sometimes if the government doesn't really think of the legislation, there could be unintended consequences. He raised the issue of potential misuse of a piece of legislation and, in this case, it could be utilized by a well-funded special interest group, and he referenced the forestry sector. I believe my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka has already addressed this briefly and, at some point, will talk about that in a lot longer detail.

My colleague from Timiskaming–Cochrane suggested that in his community a mill was lost as the result of a malicious statement by an environmental group. I think what he was alluding to is, definitely this legislation is a move in the right direction, that he supports it in principle, similar to our caucus, but we need to get to committee and make sure that we review it very carefully and ensure it's balanced legislation, so that it will serve the greater good.

He brought up the Green Energy Act. I'd like to echo that that certainly is a piece of legislation that has been very punitive to a lot of municipalities. It was done with a lot of ability to steamroll other legislation and take away democracy from local, municipally elected people. That's not good legislation. That's not something that should have happened, and we don't want to see the repeat of this type of legislation be the same.

We are generally supportive. We want to see it go forward. It is able to protect and allow people to have freedom of speech and the ability to raise their issues, but we need to make sure it's balanced to protect all of us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: Yes, just to stand up in support of my colleague's comments: Obviously he had a personal experience that was certainly a very negative impact on his family, worrying about a suit for all those years.

I can relate to something myself; I can go back to the 1990s when there was a certain company which will

remain nameless at this point that was going to build a landfill in upper Hamilton, on the mountain—on fractured bedrock, which is not a good idea in the first place. They were going to put liners in, technology and all of that. But any of the opponents of it that came out from the public—they even went as far as to—they asked some of their own in-staff about the landfill, and the people told the truth. They ended up being fired and served with papers by the company, their own employees. They used intimidation on several other private citizens who were environmentally friendly who were against this landfill—you know, harassment, bugging them with lawyers' letters, comments in the local newspapers and all these things that were going on by this individual company. They even went as far as to indicate to politicians that they wouldn't get a lot of support in the next election and things like that. In other words, they were being bullies. They wanted to get what they wanted in spite of what impact they had on average people. Of course, they were scaring everyone off because they were afraid to be sued by this particular company.

This Protection of Participation Act is long overdue. I'm glad to see it on the table. It certainly needs some more fine-tuning because some of these corporations and some of these individuals find loopholes and ways to get around legislation. We've got to close the loopholes, make it solid and protect freedom of speech and that people have the right to stand up in this province for what they believe is right and what they think is being done wrong.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Lorenzo Berardinetti: I listened very closely to the presentation made by the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, and I found his personal experience quite interesting, quite lengthy and quite detailed.

I've been here listening to the whole debate this time, and prior to the election as well, because we debated this bill prior to the election—before June 12. It has come back to us again, and I'm gaining more and more information just listening to the members here and their own personal experiences, which is quite interesting.

This government committed to putting in place this anti-SLAPP legislation that is before us today: Bill 52. I can ensure the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane that the use of intimidating tactics will not be tolerated by this government. If passed, the legislation would allow courts to quickly identify and deal with strategic lawsuits, minimizing the economic and financial strain on defendants, as well as the waste of court resources.

Just listening to the narrative and the comments made by the member, he certainly had financial stress put on him and intimidation, when you're slapped with a \$10-million lawsuit and you have to wait it out. The way this bill works is that someone like the member can go in front of a judge and apply and put an argument forward that the \$10-million lawsuit is frivolous and has no merit, and the judge can decide early in the process whether to continue that lawsuit or throw it out. I think that's a

really good measure, because you can't have a \$10-million lawsuit bothering you for months and months; perhaps even years.

So, let's take this to committee; it might need more fine-tuning. I can't wait for it to go there for further discussion, and I thank the member for his comments here today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We now return to the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane for his reply.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to thank the members for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, Hamilton East–Stoney Creek and Scarborough Southwest for their comments.

I think it's safe to say that everyone who spoke with regard to my comments agrees that the principle of this legislation is needed. I think, as in everything, the devil is in the details. We need to make sure that this legislation is more than a hollow shell and a nice press release. We need to make sure that the people who have spent a lot of time raising warning flags are listened to. At the end of the day, we might not agree with all of their concerns, but we need to make sure we listen to them, because I'm sure that some of them are valid.

That's the most important thing we can do with any legislation, and that's where this government has failed on other bills. That's why we're bringing this up. The Green Energy Act has failed on a lot of aspects—and I'm not trying to void this legislation; I'm just using it as an example. You've got solar panels; you've got windmills going up on farmland. That's a failure, especially from a government that talks about wanting to save farmland. That's a failure. You've got people who have worked hard who can't afford to heat their houses. That's a failure. And for a responsive government, you've got to look at ways we can fix that. The way to do it is to take people's concerns seriously before legislation is passed. We have to do that with this legislation, and we have to go back and look at legislation that was passed previously, because for people who can't afford to heat their houses, it is more than just a failure.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John Fraser: I will be sharing my time with the member from Scarborough–Agincourt and the Associate Minister of Finance.

It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act. Of course, the history of the bill is that it was originally introduced as a private member's bill in 2008 by the member from Hamilton Centre, and subsequently the member from Ottawa Centre put forward a private member's bill. We had the legislation, Bill 83, which we got to second reading and to committee, in the last Parliament. Then, of course, with the election, it died on the order paper. So I'm pleased that it's back.

I think there is a consensus in the House that we need to move forward on this legislation, and that it needs to have balance. I think I've heard from all sides of the

House that we need to make sure we protect the interests of all parties involved.

1540

I would like to touch on a comment from the member from Halton. She's wearing some jewellery from South Africa. She spoke about places where they don't have the same opportunity to speak as openly and freely as we do. As members of this Legislature, we have the privilege to be able to stand up and speak to bills and to important pieces of public policy. We enjoy privilege inside the House, which means the things that we say in here are not subject to the court system, in large part. There has to be a balance that we strike.

I heard some comments today from the member from Leeds–Grenville and the member from Owen Sound that livened up the debate. It was great, good to hear them. But I also wanted to remind them that about 20 years ago, the member who sat in my seat was subject of a suit from the former member from Parry Sound–Muskoka. I want to make sure that that—he's currently chair of the Treasury Board, I believe. I just wanted to remind him of that, because 20 years ago, none of us were here, but I do remember it.

I also want to touch on some of the comments from the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane, and his personal story in terms of the effect that a strategic lawsuit had on his family and his livelihood. It's important that we have this debate, Mr. Speaker, and that this comes out in debate, so we understand why it's important for us to protect people's ability to speak out on issues that affect their community, affect their families, affect their friends.

I think that in this bill we've struck a balance. We had an expert advisory panel come forward to us and make recommendations. I know we've made some changes to the bill since it was Bill 83.

If you take a look at the support, we have support from a wide range of people. Sixty-five of Ontario's municipalities have passed resolutions that want us to bring this legislation forward. Environmental groups have come forward calling on us to do that. We had the justices—the Honourable Ian Binnie, the Honourable Frank Iacobucci, the Honourable Roy McMurtry and the Honourable Coulter Osborne—who wrote the Attorney General asking us to bring this forward.

I think that the bill strikes a balance. It is really important that we do protect not only the ability to speak freely but also protect people from legitimate claims of libel or slander. It's not an easy thing to do.

I think we have a consensus in this House that we need to do something. I look forward to continuing debate and hearing what members of this House have to say, getting it to committee and making sure that, as the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane suggested, we put the best piece of legislation forward that we can.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The member for Scarborough–Agincourt.

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak in support of Bill 52. I listened to the passion from various speakers this afternoon about this proposed bill.

There seemed to be a story from every member who came forward to speak in support of the bill. We heard from our colleague from the third party talking about his own situation that arose about a potential lawsuit. I think each one of us in our own riding hears about this kind of story.

At the end of the day, this proposed legislation was brought forth going back to 2010 when the government asked for a panel. The panel came back with a number of recommendations. One of them is for this government to adopt legislation against strategic lawsuits. The other piece is, the panel also asked for the legislation to include a purpose clause for the benefit of judicial interpretation. The government is following through with the panel recommendations. As my colleague from Ottawa South just mentioned, the panel made of experts came forward with a number of recommendations asking the government to bring forth legislation of this nature.

More importantly, if the legislation is passed, Mr. Speaker, it will protect citizens across Ontario from strategic litigation because we know the government is there to protect the rights of every Ontarian. But it also allows us to speak out on matters of importance to all of us, because all of us have different issues across the province. At the end of the day, this is what makes Ontario so special. I, for one, am very proud to live in the best province in this country that encourages and supports the ability to speak out on matters that are important to our constituents and matters that are important to each one of us.

Furthermore, if the legislation is passed, it also allows the courts to quickly identify and deal with strategic lawsuits, because there are emotional issues and financial constraints if you have to take a case before the courts. Again, it also helps the defendant, who in many cases will be challenged if we have to drag out a lawsuit before the courts, and it will waste the courts' time. We heard about those nightmares in the courts for years and months because they cannot resolve an issue. I recently heard of a case involving a condominium's concerns. In each one of our ridings we hear different stories, but this made-in-Ontario legislation will address the issue of strategic lawsuits.

More importantly, it addresses the consensus recommendations by the expert panel. I think that is very important for us. We have an expert panel; we should listen to the expert panel's advice and act accordingly.

The other piece, as my colleague from Ottawa South talked about earlier, is that the proposed legislation strikes a balance to prevent abusive litigation, to stop that kind of litigation, but also to allow those legitimate actions to be taken. We don't want to stop those legitimate lawsuits occurring.

It also encourages Ontarians to speak out on issues that matter to each one of us, because no two ridings are the same across the province. We are very diverse and we need to respect the diversity, and, more importantly, to make sure each Ontarian has a right to speak out on matters of interest and concern to them.

Furthermore, anyone who has legitimate claims of libel or slander should not be discouraged or muzzled. We heard the member from Hamilton talk earlier. We heard those nightmare stories. I believe that if we have proposed legislation to protect and encourage public participation, this is what the proposed legislation is about.

At the end of the day, the proposed legislation also protects and ensures public debate on Ontario's comprehensive strategy to build a better justice system. Someone like myself—as an immigrant, I know. I come from a family from Communist China in the old days when you couldn't speak out. By having this proposed legislation, Ontarians across Ontario have an opportunity to speak out on matters that interest them, but, more importantly, on matters that are important to them.

I'm really encouraged to hear the debate today, and, more importantly, to hear the different stories. Very shortly, hopefully, this bill will go before the committee and have more stakeholder comments.

Finally, I also wanted to comment on my colleague from Ottawa South, who commented on numerous municipalities asking and encouraging our government to pass this proposed legislation. We also heard that different groups had written to the Attorney General supporting the proposed legislation.

At the end of the day, this is good legislation. As my predecessor, the Honourable Gerry Phillips, said to me, if it's the right thing to do, do it now. Don't wait until tomorrow; don't wait until there's a crisis.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bas Balkissoon): The Associate Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I'm also pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 52 and to join my colleagues in really underscoring the importance of bringing this bill back in front of the House.

Our court system is one of the central institutions of our fair and democratic society. By protecting citizens against strategic litigation, our government is protecting the right of Ontario residents to speak out on matters that are important and really vital to us. If passed, this legislation would allow courts to quickly identify and deal with strategic lawsuits, minimizing the emotional and financial strain on defendants as well as the waste of our court resources.

I know very much, coming from my riding of Scarborough-Guildwood, that being respectful of people's capacity to utilize our court system is of vital importance. Oftentimes I will have people who come into the constituency office and really are seeking even greater assistance to have their matters heard.

1550

We're proposing in this bill a made-in-Ontario approach to addressing the issue of strategic lawsuits, based on consensus and recommendations—as my colleague from Scarborough-Agincourt said—from the expert advisory panel, as well as from extensive stakeholder consultation, advice and input into this legislation. Our proposed legislation strikes a balance that will help ensure that abusive litigation is stopped but that legitimate actions can proceed through the courts. In fact, it will

essentially free up more capacity within the courts for those legitimate cases to get the attention that they need and that they deserve. Anyone who has a legitimate claim of libel or slander should not be discouraged, Speaker, by this legislation. In fact, the whole goal here is to ensure that more of those cases can be addressed, and those claims advanced, more quickly.

Protecting public debate is part of Ontario's comprehensive strategy to build Better Justice Together. When Bill 83 died because of the dissolution of the Legislature for the general election—that's why we weren't able to move forward with Bill 83—to reintroduce legislation to protect the public from lawsuits intended to discourage public participation was absolutely necessary. So Bill 52 was brought back forward, and if passed, this legislation will protect the right of Ontario residents to speak out on matters that are important.

The current bill includes a few minor amendments. It clarifies the appeal process respecting decisions (a) to dismiss lawsuits as strategic lawsuits and (b) to stay related administrative proceedings, as well. It also limits the amount of time spent on cross-examinations to seven hours per side, rather than one day per party. It also applies the legislation only to those lawsuits begun after the reintroduction of the bill, so as not to interfere with ongoing litigation; that provides necessary clarity to the courts, as well, as cases are ongoing. It also changes the effective date of the bill to the date of royal assent, instead of proclamation. Once again, urgency and time are important to really move these matters forward.

The ministry is aware that in certain sectors, like the forestry industry and, obviously, certain municipalities, there might be concern that the bill would allow undue or unfair criticism of very legitimate operations—forestry operations, business and economic operations. The legislation really aims to balance the interests of the defendants as well as the plaintiffs in defamation suits—the protection of public participation and the freedom of expression versus the protection of reputation and economic interests. It's really taking into account the input and the feedback from all sides; and I think the good work of the panel, as my colleague said, as well as those stakeholders, has really helped to shape this bill.

The proposed legal test for identifying strategic lawsuits is carefully balanced to ensure that lawsuits that seriously harm reputation, business or personal interests of others can continue. So it's very important that we really signal in this passage of Bill 52 that we are really seeking those very serious and warranted cases to come forward, and those that are just for strategic purposes will be cleared out of our court system to free up that time and that capacity.

One of the great things, Speaker, about living in a fair and democratic society is that we can speak out on matters that are important to us. I heard my colleague from Scarborough—Agincourt talk about places where that isn't the norm and that is not encouraged. We here in Ontario have that. It's something that we value and that we hold very dear to our democracy. By protecting citi-

zens against strategic litigation, our government is standing up for the values of the people of Ontario that we cherish. That's something that I just want to reinforce here, as I have the opportunity to stand and to speak in support of Bill 52. Certainly protecting expression on matters of public interest from undue interference, promoting the freedom of the public to participate in matters of public interest through expression and protecting citizens who exercise their views, is very important.

For example, in the planning process we know that this is also a very critical and necessary component. We're even working here at multiple levels of government, and we're working through communities and through municipalities. So having this type of legislation is going to also free up capacity within our municipal levels of government as well, as they seek provide that greater clarity through the planning process.

I just want to reiterate what this new bill includes in terms of its amendments: clarifying the appeal process respecting decisions to dismiss lawsuits as strategic lawsuits and stay related administrative proceedings; limiting the amount of time spent on cross-examination to seven hours per side rather than seven hours per party; as well as applying the legislation only to those lawsuits begun after the introduction of the bill so as not to interfere with ongoing litigation; and, of course, changing the effective date of the bill from the date of royal assent instead of proclamation.

I want to say, as I only have a couple of short minutes, that oftentimes, as I'm in my constituency office week to week, people will come forward—getting time through our court system is very important. It's important to their quality of life. It's important to the limited resources that they may have in their families, and having these types of strategic lawsuits tying up our court time and our court proceedings. Oftentimes it could even drain the resources of people before they have the opportunity to have their matters really settled. This is very discouraging—affects lives and affects individuals' quality of life.

I certainly join my colleagues in saying that this type of bill, Bill 52, is one that can be improved if we move forward in our agreement to support Bill 52 and get it passed, so that it can do the good work that it needs to do, which is to free up the resources in our court system and ensure that those legitimate matters that really need to be heard have their day and can receive the support that is expected.

I want to thank you so much for the time today to speak to Bill 52, and just want to add my support for this legislation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Robert Bailey: I'd like to comment on the remarks of Ottawa South, Scarborough—Guildwood and Scarborough—Agincourt, and talk about this bill as well.

We support this bill at the end of the day. We want to see it go to committee and be improved. I know down in my riding as well that there's a number of citizens who would benefit from this because we've had a number of

big organizations to do with wind turbines, which everybody in Ontario is very aware of, where they've made it very difficult for people who oppose them. One lady left the province: Esther Wrightman. I know that's not a name that's unfamiliar in this room. She took on—I have to be careful and get the right name—NextEra versus—I won't say what the other name was that they used. But anyway, she took that—

Interjection.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Yes, that could have been it. She took that organization on. She felt that she had to leave the province because they made it untenable for her to survive and stay here with her family. She's from the riding of Lambton-Kent-Middlesex, but she certainly took that fight on for everyone in Ontario. She took that fight across the province. She was a very vocal advocate and did her due diligence for her family and for a number of other people who were unable to or would not take the step.

This bill, Bill 52, if it's enacted, will allow defendants in these kinds of situations to move a motion that would allow them the chance to prove to a judge that the legal proceedings being brought against them were unfair and were really targeted to just make them shut up and be silent. We want to see that legislation improved.

1600

The judge would also be able to award compensation regarding costs if it was appropriate.

They would have a 60-day timeline on the hearing, so it would have to be tenable. This would amend the Libel and Slander Act.

I guess my time's up.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's indeed a pleasure to stand on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Windsor-Tecumseh and say a few words this afternoon to the members from Ottawa South and Scarborough-Agincourt and the Associate Minister of Finance—very good comments.

When we talk about this anti-SLAPP legislation, I guess I can speak from a personal perspective. I was here just last term and I got served with a notice that I'd better shut up and not mention a certain company again or else I'd be in court.

Hon. Jeff Leal: SLAPped.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: SLAPped. Now, mind you, the suit went away. I'll tell you more about that when I have the opportunity later on this afternoon. But that was as a member of the provincial Legislature.

In my former role as a city councillor—as many councillors who are here know, there's always somebody out there who is going to sue the entire city, the mayor and the councillors. That happened more than once—never successfully, but the suits are out there.

In a former role as a municipal affairs reporter with the CBC, lawsuits weren't uncommon—never successfully, again. But it always niggles at the back of your mind: "Okay, I've got this suit pending. We're talking

major bucks here, and where am I going to get the money if we lose?"

I'm glad to be able to speak to this bill and to say it's badly needed. We have to put an end to this type of intimidation by the big bullies, and I look forward—later on in the afternoon, perhaps, if there's time—to filling you in on one or more of these misadventures that I've been through in the past few years.

Thank you for your time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I was watching the member for Brockville—Leeds-Grenville—who was on this morning, and his speech was different from the member for Samia-Lambton. He made reference to a lawsuit today, believe it or not—you wouldn't believe this; you probably weren't in the chair—launched by the Premier against the former leader of the opposition and another member of the Conservative caucus and was talking about how awful this was in the context, because we're both speaking in the context of SLAPP suits.

I thought you, Mr. Speaker, having been here as long as you have—a distinguished and long-serving member of the Legislature—would remember that a gentleman by the name of Tony Clement, a federal cabinet minister, launched a lawsuit against the official opposition leader, Dalton McGuinty, and actually, I guess you could say, won the lawsuit, because Mr. McGuinty had to make amends. Therefore, you could say he won the lawsuit. Anyway, I appreciate you allowing me to get into some history and rebut the member for Brockville.

On this matter itself of the SLAPP suits, I am a very strong proponent of this from way back, and I notice it's something all three parties have made reference to. I think it was the member for Haldimand-Norfolk who made reference to the Simcoe case, which I think is a cause célèbre. But in St. Catharines, we had a former—actually, a person who I ran against first to get elected to the Legislature, Eleanor Lancaster, a great person in St. Catharines. She got hit with a kind of SLAPP suit. She went out and she found out that people had misspelt during an election campaign municipally. Because she was being a good citizen and launching this, people went to court and tried to extract all kinds of her personal finances as a result of this. That's why this bill is needed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steve Clark: It's a pleasure to respond to a number of government members on this bill.

With the member for Ottawa South speaking about 65 municipalities that have come and said that they want this bill passed, I can recall a number of Ontario's 444 municipalities that were gobsmacked when the Attorney General addressed joint and several liability at last year's AMO conference. They were completely gobsmacked with her response. I want to say that the member for Perth-Wellington should be applauded, not just for his comments earlier today in the Legislature, but also for his initiative on dealing with joint and several liability.

But I do want to make a comment. I know the government was mad when I talked about the Premier saying one thing and doing something completely different. Don't take my word for it. Just Google "Kathleen Wynne SLAPP." That's "Kathleen Wynne S-L-A-P-P." The very first story that comes up is a column in the Financial Post from March 31. Here's the title of the story: "Why Kathleen Wynne's Legal Threat against Tim Hudak May Not Be the Smartest Option."

I think the members opposite should realize that this government says one thing, when it comes to Bill 52, and then does something completely different when the Premier has her suit against the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook and the member for Nepean—Carleton. To me, this government talks out of both sides of its mouth.

I'm tired of your self-righteous attitude—I used those words earlier. Maybe those were the words that upset the member for Ottawa South. It doesn't matter. Google "Kathleen Wynne SLAPP." There's a video there from Ezra Levant. I haven't had a chance to look at it yet, but I'm going to do that later this afternoon. I think it's going to be enlightening.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I checked: With the tablets, I don't think you're supposed to be looking at YouTube in the House, right? I don't think so.

That concludes questions and comments. I return to the member for Ottawa South for his reply.

Mr. John Fraser: It was a pleasure to share my time with the member from Scarborough—Agincourt and the Associate Minister of Finance. I appreciate the comments of the members from Sarnia—Lambton and Windsor—Tecumseh, the Chair of Cabinet, and the member from Leeds—Grenville.

I do, however, want to say that I did misspeak; the Chair of Cabinet actually corrected me. It was the former member from Brampton West—Mississauga, not the former member from Parry Sound. I thank the current member from Parry Sound for mentioning that to me.

The member from Sarnia—Lambton is correct when he says that sometimes it's just a couple of people who are leading the fight. They take on that responsibility for all of us—all the people in their community. They take the risk, so we have to do something fair and balanced to make sure that risk is fair and balanced.

To the member from Windsor—Tecumseh, I would say that your misadventures aren't necessarily misadventures, other than they probably felt like that. You did what you were feeling was the right thing to do. In my books, that's not a misadventure. Obviously, the consequences—you won them all, so things are good.

I would, however, like to address the comments of the member from Leeds—Grenville. I do appreciate his comments, and I remind him of the former member from Brampton West—Mississauga.

The thing is: We have to be careful about the words we use. We have to be careful about the words we use in this Legislature; there are rules. There are rules outside of here, and we have to follow those rules.

This legislation is about balance. It's about making sure that those rules outside of here—

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm going to send a copy to Tony Clement.

Mr. John Fraser: We'll email it to him right now, on the member from Leeds—Grenville's project.

Anyhow, I just want to remind him of that, and that I appreciate his comments very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm going to share some thoughts on Bill 52, An Act to amend the Courts of Justice Act, the Libel and Slander Act and the Statutory Powers Procedure Act in order to protect expression on matters of public interest, or Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill, commonly referred to as anti-SLAPP, seeks to amend the Courts of Justice Act, the Libel and Slander Act and the Statutory Powers Procedure Act in order to protect expression on matters of public interest. In other words, this bill aims to protect citizens, as they publicly voice concerns on matters of public interest, from fear of retribution; namely, the use of lawsuits against them as a means to silence or deter them from participating in discussion.

This bill was a recommendation from a 2010 report, and is a reincarnation of Bill 83, which died on the order paper when the Liberal government called the election last May.

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Some of my constituents have been vocal about their support of Bill 52. Here is just a smattering of some of my constituents' comments on why we need this bill to pass into law:

"SLAPPs threaten the very core of democratic dialogue. Citizens need to feel free to stand up and voice their concerns and government needs to hear them out." That was Michael from Georgian Bluffs in the great riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Another quote: "I'm concerned about the increasing number of lawsuits intended to discourage citizens, individuals or groups, from participating in the democratic process." That was Ann from Warton.

I quote again: "All citizens should have the right to make a complaint free of fear of reprisals by the very government that is supposed to be there to defend their rights." That was Margaret from Owen Sound.

Another quote: "It is important that ordinary citizens not be intimidated by expensive legal fees...." That was Jennifer from Shallow Lake.

I'd also like to mention that a few municipalities have passed resolutions in favour of Bill 52. One of them is in my riding, the township of Georgian Bluffs. They passed that resolution on March 4.

Mr. Speaker, I agree and support Bill 52, in principle. Principally, I agree that the bedrock of our democratic society is that we have healthy and strong public participation in our communities, voicing our concerns—even dissenting ones. That's what we're all here to do. Oftentimes, particularly when we as the opposition stand, that's our job. Our job is to look at legislation, to look at

things the government is doing or intending to do and to challenge them on it, to ensure that they're creating legislation that's going to be good, effective legislation for all users, all people who are going to be bound to that law, to that legislation. So I think it's always healthy when we have a good discussion, a good debate, in fact; and dissenting views are always welcome, I believe, as long as you can do it in a respectful, civil manner and take from it that there is really a good rationale to bring that forward. Hopefully, the other party can look at it, and at the end of the day we can then all come back, especially in committee, and look at those amendments, look at changes that are going to strengthen that bill, to make it the best, most effective legislation that we can come up with.

The bottom line, at the end of the day, is that we need to protect people's right to speak up on matters that impact them. Really, if we go right back to those brave individuals who died in the wars for us, it's that freedom of expression, freedom of speech that we all have the liberty to enjoy because of their heroic deeds and actions. It's something that I think we all have to stand in this House every day and remember, that we have that privilege, we have that right to speak freely.

Any time someone comes along and threatens that, particularly if it's a large group with a lot of money that tries to stifle debate, to stifle the ability for people, individuals, organizations, associations, even a small group of people, to have their say, to be able to bring their viewpoint to the table, I think we all have a right to stand up and fight that.

As I have told my constituents who wrote or called me about this bill, we've had a few examples of public participation being under attack in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. It's been talked about a lot in here today by a number of the speakers, the Green Energy Act. Particularly, the wind turbines are always top of mind in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. I talk about the heavy cost of litigation brought against my constituents by a wind turbine company. They really came in, a lot of these large companies, particularly with foreign ownership, and tried to bully their way through. They've tried to steamroll. Sadly, this government wrote legislation that virtually undermined all other legislation, which allows them to do that.

Our democratically elected representatives at the municipal level really have been silenced because the Green Energy Act just came in and said, "We don't need to listen to you. We don't need to ask for your opinion or your approval. We can place these wind turbines here if that's where we want them to go." It's unbelievable, Mr. Speaker. It has put a lot of people under significant stress and burden.

Was it meant to silence them, to intimidate them? A \$300,000 lawsuit can easily silence anyone into submission, particularly those of modest means. They just finally say, "You know what? I don't have the ability, I don't have the money, to be able to go against that." One of my colleagues here, from Timiskaming-Cochrane, I

think, said that—a farmer who was working hard, raising a family, running his business. When you start throwing lawsuits at them, that becomes very, very challenging. I credit him and applaud him for standing his ground for his principles and not giving in, despite his own insurance company coming to him and saying, "You need to give up on this. You need to pass and just retract those statements." So kudos to you, my colleague Mr. Vanthof from Timiskaming-Cochrane, for standing up for what you believe is right. That's what we all get sent here to do, and I trust that's why he has been re-elected to represent the people in his riding.

Some of that has happened across rural communities after residents tried to stop wind corporations from surrounding their homes and communities with giant turbines. They don't want them, they didn't want them, they continue to not want them, and yet, at the end of the day, they still have large lawsuits that are intimidating at this point.

In their statement of claim, the companies alleged that the residents were making misleading statements to discredit their business and have made misleading statements to the public, such as making comments on how residents were feeling terrorized by the wind companies.

The Green Energy Act was and continues to be a thorn in the side of rural communities and one that has brought on this kind of intimidating litigation that we're trying to stop here today. You can't threaten. You can't bully just because you're big and you have lots of money. That's not the way we do things in Ontario. It's not the way we do things in Canada, Mr. Speaker, and I think all of us in this House want to stand up and ensure that everybody has the equal right to speak.

Rural Ontario in particular has never really been the same since this government forced the Green Energy Act on our communities. I think it's only a bit ironic that we're debating Bill 52 in the context of this Liberal government's Green Energy Act. They have actually put legislation in place that took away the ability for locals to have a say in anything. Many other businesses wouldn't be allowed if we used current legislation before the Green Energy Act, and yet they brought in this legislation that supersedes and gives them the power to choose, "We will put wind turbines there," in someone else's backyard. A lot of people making those decisions will never have to put up with those wind turbines in their backyards, but they are certainly okay with it being done in someone else's.

It's especially ironic, Mr. Speaker, in the context of the Premier's own lawsuit slapped on two members of our opposition party. Her \$2-million lawsuit against the two members of our caucus is over the concerns they raised and the comments they made on the Premier's party's gas plant scandal, which has been under investigation by the Ontario Provincial Police for almost two years.

Of course, everyone in the House knows, as do members of the public, that we in the official opposition have questioned and continue to question the Premier's role in

the alleged wiping of computer hard drives in the office of former Premier Dalton McGuinty that relate to the cancellation of two gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga. Yet, at the end of the day, this Premier chooses not to bring two people forward to give testimony, the people that actually know the truth about this, and yet ironically she brings out this type of legislation.

I think my colleague from Leeds–Grenville has very appropriately brought up that saying and doing different things, different meanings—he used a different word that I’m not going to use so that I don’t have to withdraw, Mr. Speaker. But at the end of the day, we need to ensure that when someone says something, there’s one set of rules for all across our land and across our province. I have concerns that in some cases there is a bit of irony going on here, that what’s good for the goose isn’t always good for the gander.

How ironic and farcical that the same government that wants to protect us from intimidation practices is using a \$2-million lawsuit to intimidate and to shut down conversations to try to not allow them to speak—two members of the official opposition, two good colleagues of mine. To me, this \$2-million lawsuit is meant to stifle, silence and punish the two opposition MPPs for daring to question and give opposing viewpoints on the Liberal Party’s billion-dollar gas plant scandal. It’s simply unacceptable.

I believe that when people elected us, they entrusted us with the responsibility to ask tough questions. That’s part of the job of the official opposition: to challenge, to question, to ensure that the government is actually doing things in the best interest of the greater good for all of the people who have duly sent us here. Our pursuit of the truth is how we hold this government to account—any government, truly, to account. With this one, certainly, there are lots of reasons to hold it to account. Every day, sadly, we’re bringing them to account. Now we have four unprecedented investigations. I would be fearful that this government, again, is trying to bring in something to their own benefit that they can use to stifle debate and stifle us asking questions, and yet they’re trying to appear to the public that they want accountability and they want transparency. There are challenges sometimes when we hear one thing and yet we see a totally different action from that side of the House.

Because those two MPPs in our caucus raised valid criticism and debated an issue of great public interest, perhaps the Premier will want to be a willing host for the first application of Bill 52 when it’s passed into law.

There are a lot of good things. I think this is a step in the right direction, but I also do want to allude—and I believe my colleague from Parry Sound–Muskoka, when he has his turn to address, will bring this up, and certainly the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane—that we have to ensure that when we write legislation, it’s actually there for the greater good. We have to be cautious not to allow unintended consequences to come forward when certain large companies or vocal groups can actually misuse this type of legislation. I think well-funded

special interest groups certainly could take this, if we don’t write it properly—with balance, and making sure that we close any of those gaps and those corners so they can’t utilize it for their own benefit and turn it against a group—because we need to ensure that this legislation will always protect the greater good. We need to make sure that we’re not going to open up a door for people to use it in the exact reverse way that it was intended and be able to shut down things and shut down people being able to speak.

I think the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane gave an example of a mill in his riding that, as a result of malicious statements made by environmental groups, actually left his area. He lost that mill and that employment, the ability for that community to survive and thrive, because of some malicious statements that you can’t retract. The old laws allowed people to come out and say those types of things with really no retribution to them. I think it is a good first step. It’s moving in the right direction, in principle, I do believe. But I think we need to make sure we look at it from a well-rounded perspective. We need to ensure that there aren’t unintended consequences.

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A SLAPP is a lawsuit that is pursued for the sole purpose of silencing or punishing those with an opposing viewpoint. That’s unacceptable. As I said in my opening remarks, our province, our country, has the privilege because of those forefathers who went ahead of us, those brave souls who fought for us and lost their lives, made the ultimate sacrifice so we can have free speech. Anything that stifles that is simply not acceptable.

This effect is also sometimes referred to as litigation chill. Part of what defines a SLAPP is the fact that it is a meritless case, and it’s intended more to intimidate or punish the defendant rather than seek justice for a wrong suffered by the plaintiff. Typically, SLAPPs are withdrawn shortly before going to trial; however, by this time, they have served their purposes. They have forced the defendant to go through an extended period of duress, often at great cost financially.

Again, a lot of these things can happen, Mr. Speaker, where there would be a well-funded third-party special-interest group that knows that they’ve got a small body there, an individual or a small group of people, that doesn’t have the financial resources to fight this. They’re hoping that by bringing this out, they can just shut them down, they can keep them from having their say, and that’s inappropriate. Hopefully, we can utilize this legislation, Bill 52, to address that.

Bill 52 establishes a new legal procedure that can be used if someone is sued for voicing their opinion or opinions on matters of public interest. If enacted, Bill 52 would allow the defendant in this situation to move a motion that would allow them the chance to prove to a judge that the legal proceeding brought against them arises from a communication they made regarding the public interest. If the judge was satisfied that this is the case, the legal proceeding would be dismissed, as it

would, in effect, be determined a SLAPP. However, if the judge was not satisfied, the legal proceeding would proceed.

The judge would also be able to award compensation regarding costs in the motion if they deemed it appropriate. Again, we hear cases where there are frivolous lawsuits brought against someone, and we have no recourse to ever go after those people making those frivolous cases.

In my case, certainly I've had a lot of experience with quarries. Someone can bring up a frivolous concern against a quarry wanting to expand or open a quarry, with no real ramification to that person bringing it up. Yet they may hold that company, and more importantly, the people that that company may actually employ and give gainful employment to, up for many, many years and at millions of dollars of expense to said quarry owner. Those types of things, Mr. Speaker, I'm also trying to look out for as a legislator, to say, "How can we close those loopholes?" Nothing against someone being able to have their say, but in that case, it's the opposite of this: They're actually trying to hold up something with no real, sound, rational ability.

I'm going to go back to some of the more technical points.

If the judge dismisses the legal proceeding due to the motion and finds that the suing party brought the proceeding in bad faith, the judge may award the defendant damages as the judge considers appropriate. Again, I think that's a good strategy. That ensures that people doing it for frivolous reasons won't come forward. It's making sure that when there are sound, legitimate things going on, that can't happen and somebody can't frivolously or vexatiously hold that proceeding up.

If the suing party has proceedings before a tribunal, the defendant who has moved a motion under Bill 52 may also supply a copy of the motion that was filed with the court to the tribunal, and the tribunal proceeding shall be stayed until the motion is dealt with in court. Bill 52 also places a 60-day timeline on the hearing of the motion so that the matter may be dealt with in a timely manner. Again, I think what's happened in the past is, someone files this motion, and it just sits there in perpetuity for the most part—long periods of time that just stretch out the resources of the other party to a point, hoping that they'll just go away or they'll say, "I can't afford it if this stays in court too long," and they'll just give up and walk away. Thereby they are silencing that party again. That's not acceptable, Mr. Speaker.

This is a key factor in limiting SLAPPs' negative effect on the court system. It is also important for countering the effect of potentially having tribunal proceedings stayed while the motion is before the courts.

The bill also amends the Libel and Slander Act to establish that the current privileges regarding oral or written communication possessed by individuals who have a direct interest in a matter of public interest are also extended to media representations or communications of said individuals' oral or written communication.

Basically, right now if someone has a direct interest in a matter of public interest, they can discuss it and be fairly protected from legal action. However, if a reporter or someone else were to write about what that person said and publish it, then they would be susceptible to legal action because they could be seen as not having a direct interest in the matter. Bill 52 extends protections to include individuals/reporters recounting/repeating any discussions on the matter.

As PC caucus members, we stand behind the right of individuals to express their opinions, especially on matters of public interest. Again, back to most of what I've said here today, that's the whole fundamental tenet that we're based on: the ability to have free speech, the ability to challenge. Certainly, as a member of the opposition, that's one of the key roles and responsibilities that we have, to be frank: to ensure that we voice our concerns openly, that we are able to challenge the government on an act that they're bringing in or an intention that they want to bring in.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Take your time.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'm going a little slower today, Percy. Have you noticed that?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Talk faster.

Mr. Bill Walker: Do you want me to ramp it up? Go back in auctioneer mode and get a few more words in?

Any time that we stifle the ability for anyone, whether it be an individual in this Parliament or outside of Parliament, to actually have an open dialogue, I think we're hurting all of us collectively. I think we're hurting the ability for us to have the best outcomes possible because I think that, at the end of the day, whenever you challenge anything there is typically a good exchange of information. You take all sides, you take all matters into consideration and, if you're truly being objective, you will come out with a better product at the end.

The reality is that while SLAPPs, as they are known, are relatively rare, when they do occur they can in fact ruin people's lives. We can't accept that, Mr. Speaker. We do not think it is appropriate for residents to fear having a voice in the growth of their communities. You want people to be able to come forward. I again go back to the Green Energy Act, a case where that legislation by the Liberal government that imposed it on communities is so strong and so powerful that people have felt they don't have a say, that they can't actually step up. Then the companies that typically are involved with these wind turbine facilities are so strong and so powerful that they, again, intentionally intimidate and try to put a lawsuit in place to fearmonger, to make that person step back and not voice a concern. Then they can pretend that all is well and good in that community. Certainly in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound I applaud those people who, from day one of the Green Energy Act, have stood up and fought hard. People like Lorrie Gillis and a multitude of others out there continue to fight the wind turbines.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: You could do that. She's thrown me totally off here.

Interjection: That's okay. She's being sued.

Mr. Bill Walker: Yes, she's being sued.

I'll go back to that. The wind turbine companies have taken away—they've superseded the powers of the local democratically elected municipal officials, and that's inappropriate. The companies have just added on to that. I think in some cases this bill will help out those types of situations.

Moreover, these SLAPPS are by definition unfounded and stand little chance of succeeding, so they needlessly bog down Ontario's court system. Certainly, from my perspective, you want the courts to be there to hear the court cases that are relevant, that are pertinent and that are helping the most people. Sometimes these types of lawsuits that can be imposed slow down, bog down that whole court system, so that people who truly need to be getting in front of a judge and jury are not getting there and not getting what they need to happen.

As I have said earlier, I certainly, in principle, support this bill. I want to ensure that we always protect the rights of people, organizations, groups, whether indirectly or directly associated, to have the ability to stand up and have their say, to legitimately challenge something that is being done by a government of the day that may well be well intended but that they may just not have looked—and I think we've heard, again, about the unintended consequences that sometimes arise if we don't do this in a well-balanced manner, that we look for gaps that could actually be in the legislation because the certain party introducing it hasn't looked close enough, hasn't defined it well enough, hasn't truly wanted to cut out all of the gaps. They've only got one specific interest in mind and it's a big headline. But I think this is legislation that we should be getting to committee. We should be looking at it from a well-rounded perspective and ensuring there are no unintended consequences.

Stop the frivolous, vexatious type of lawsuits and not allow companies to intimidate someone who is an individual or small group, and make sure that we always protect the right of an individual to have their say.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It's always an honour to stand in this House and it's a pleasure today to follow the member from Bruce-Gray-Owen Sound. He brought forward a lot of good points regarding this bill. I think we share the view that this bill should go forward, but we have to be cognizant of the possible misuses of any type of legislation and we have to be very careful going forward with this bill.

1630

He also brought forward issues that are very relevant in my riding, specifically the Green Energy Act, a bill that wasn't carefully drafted and wasn't well developed because—and again I'll use the same example—there are solar panels going up on prime agricultural land in my riding. That's obviously a problem. We've got major solar developments in my riding who got FIT contracts. They were billed as if they were going to be booms for

our small communities, and they have turned out to be busts, because while the projects are being built, the contractors aren't paid, again. I asked the Premier, who directed it to the Minister of Energy, and I have never gotten an answer why. I've got one contract, one site, \$20 million: never got paid. Another site, as we speak, \$40 million isn't getting paid. They've got FIT contracts. We're told it's part of the contract. One of the faults that's hurting these contractors is in the FIT contracts themselves. What were supposed to be booms for the local economy turned out to be busts.

Why this is relevant to this bill is because that is evidence of bills that weren't carefully thought out by this government, and it's our hope that this bill, if and when it goes forward, is carefully thought out.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm always encouraged by the unanimity that I see in the House whenever it happens, and there's unanimity at this time in the support of this bill in principle, I understand. I don't know whether there has been a change now since Patrick Brown has been travelling the province in the position of the Conservative Party. Anyway, I have found an article from Ontario Farmer by Ian Cumming that talks about the race, but it has nothing to do with this so I'm not going to mention it. So I will go on.

Here's a situation—I think the member from northern Ontario, from Timiskaming, has made a good point. It reminds me of Eleanor Lancaster in St. Catharines, who is a prominent citizen. Her husband, Bud Lancaster, was appointed to the OMB, I think by Mr. Davis or Mr. Roberts—a prominent city family. She took it upon herself—and that shows why we need SLAPP suits—to look at some of the donations which were made municipally to people in St. Catharines and the Niagara region. She found that there were illegal donations that had taken place, so she filed a complaint. Unfortunately, she only filed it with the city clerk, someone able to deal with the city ones and not the regional ones. What happened for doing a service to the community? They took her to court, the people she had forced, I guess, to give the money back. There may have been another penalty, but they did not choose to oppose that penalty. Those individuals took her to court and were going to cost her thousands upon thousands of dollars simply for doing her duty as a citizen.

I think most of St. Catharines—almost all of St. Catharines—would have rallied around her, and I know she'll be pleased to see a SLAPP suit bill before this House now that deals in a general sense with this kind of matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? The member for Haldimand-Norfolk.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yes, Speaker: no questions, but I do have a comment on the presentation by our member from Bruce-Gray-Owen Sound. He made mention several times over of various individuals or organizations acting frivolously, the frivolous reasons that some of this comes forward.

There's two sides to the story. There are organizations or individuals that are subject to a lawsuit from a company, and then we have the example of a company that, rightfully so, from what I understand, had a legitimate lawsuit against Greenpeace. So there are two sides to the story and we can't muzzle any of these legitimate lawsuits.

I might take the opportunity to correct my record in the House. I made mention of being named in a lawsuit for a total of \$226 billion, and I want to correct my record. It's not \$226 billion. I made an error. I went and looked it up. I'm named in a lawsuit for \$260 billion, so I apologize to the House. I didn't mean to lowball it or anything like that. I guess my wife and I and a few other people—

Interjection.

Mr. Toby Barrett: It will be another \$34 billion.

Again, when it gets into those kinds of numbers—I know, when it was delivered to the office—many of us, as MPPs, have these kinds of things walk in the front door. I know I got a subpoena a few years ago to end up in court on Christmas Eve. That kind of went over like a lead balloon in my family.

But, yes, I'm named in a lawsuit—as well as a few other elected representatives in Haldimand and Brantford—for \$260 billion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Windsor—Tecumseh on a question and comment.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'd like to make a comment on the comments made by the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

But before I do, may I take this occasion to bring birthday greetings to the member from York Centre, who turned 84—was it yesterday? The longest-serving, the oldest serving member of the Ontario Legislature, the record-setting member from York Centre: Happy birthday.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: On a point of order, Speaker: Every day sets a new record.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Yes. The microphone wasn't on, but he said that every day he sets a new record.

Interjections.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Getting back to the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound: Every day in the House, when I'm here and they call for introduction of bills, I'm always waiting for somebody to stand up and say, "I'd like to introduce Bill Walker from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound." I keep waiting for that, and it hasn't happened.

I really appreciate what he had to say. The one thing that troubled me in the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound's commentary, though, was that it seemed to me he was sticking up for the owners of a quarry, as opposed to the landowners who would live near that quarry and might need some protection as well.

I could have misheard him; I give him that. I know, on this side of the opposition bench, New Democrats are perhaps better known for standing up for the little guy and protecting the little guy against the interests of the big corporations. So if the big quarry owner wants to

expand a quarry, chances are that the New Democrats would be with the neighbours, who might say, "We don't want that quarry in our backyard, in our front yard, on our road; we don't want the extra traffic," or whatever it may be.

But other than that, I think the member from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound did his residents proud in standing up and saying that this legislation is good. It could be improved, but I think it is long overdue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. We return to the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you very much, certainly, to the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane and the Chair of Cabinet—most days, he actually says, "I'd like to introduce Bill Walker"; I hear him quietly over there, during introduction of bills—and the members from Haldimand—Norfolk and certainly Windsor—Tecumseh.

I too would like to extend my belated birthday greetings to the member from York Centre. May you continue to set those records on a daily basis for a long time to come.

I wasn't going to, but now that he's raised the point, I would like to clarify about the landowners versus the quarry corporation. What I was trying to say there is, I think that at times, there are vexatious things that are happening that hold up a quarry.

I'd like to remind my honourable colleague and his colleagues in the NDP that a lot of those big, mean corporations actually create a lot of the jobs that you supposedly try to always defend.

What I was trying to say is, I think there should always be the ability for a landowner—a person—to be able to say, "I have concerns. I'm able to come up and address that." But if they vexatiously bring things that continually prohibit that quarry owner from legitimately expanding within the rules, then there should be some recourse.

I certainly have cases—there are a number in my own riding and across this province—where companies have been held up, and it cost tens of millions of dollars that could be going into the economy, creating more jobs, creating more economic benefit for all of us, as opposed to someone who vexatiously can hold it up because of a technicality in poor legislation. That's what I don't want this bill to become.

I think his colleague from Timiskaming—Cochrane and I are on the same page there: We need to ensure that legislation is created to allow us to always have the best interests at heart.

Certainly, I think, at the end of the day, the Chair of Cabinet also was alluding to doing the right thing. I want to take this opportunity to say to him, to pass back to their Premier, that not allowing two of my colleagues—or holding a \$2-million lawsuit over their heads so that they don't continue to speak up is not doing the right thing. Hopefully, she will take this piece of legislation that's proposed by her government, do the right thing and dismiss that lawsuit immediately against my two colleagues in my PC caucus.

1640

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's a pleasure to stand today in the House to comment on Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act. It's been an interesting debate, because I do think that a majority of the people in this House do agree on some basic principles that are contained within this legislation. The bill, for the most part, does reflect some of the recommendations that came forward from the 2010 panel.

It has taken a long time to get here. There are some flaws that need to be fixed, and certainly we in the NDP are committed to ensuring that hard work actually happens at the committee level.

Also, I think that it needs to be mentioned that our leader, Andrea Horwath, brought forward similar pieces of legislation in the past, in 2008 and 2012. It's actually caused me to remember the first time I came to the House to spend the day with our leader. At the time, she was mentoring me. That day, it was the presumptive legislation that was passed, all in one sitting. I'm sure the Speaker will remember that because that piece of legislation got pushed and pushed and pushed, and the government brought it forward, but then the Conservatives sort of moved it, and then they had to pass it.

At the end of that whole process—I don't think that's ever happened. I think that was the sole time that a piece of legislation was passed on the floor of the Legislature, all three motions passed, and it became law—after, of course, it got proclaimed. So that's how things sometimes happen in this place. It's a slow process. It doesn't always have to be slow, I must say, and I feel that way about this piece of legislation.

The three major issues, though, that I do want to address in a very cursory sort of way are that the bill, as I said, does incorporate some of the recommendations from the panel—a majority of them. However, it doesn't reverse the onus of proof. I think that this is a major flaw.

The government has the ability to bring a stronger piece of legislation here for us to debate. I don't think there's any question that the party initiating the suit does not have to prove that the suit is not being brought to silence public participation. So this really is the essence of what we're trying to address. For people to have the courage to speak up, speak out and take action on very controversial issues—some of those issues are environmental, and I think that those are the majority of the ones that we think about. But it's also important to understand that activities that attract SLAPPs include citizens' reporting of environmental violations, filing complaints with government agencies, contacting the media, speaking at public meetings, participating at hearings before administrative tribunals or engaging in public campaigns.

All of us in this House, if you've ever sat on a committee, and all of us have, and someone has come forward to raise a concern—for instance, the finance committee travelled all across the province and listened

to the lived experience of Ontarians. It's incredible to me. Some people just shake, they're so intimidated by this process, and I think that's our fault, really. We need to make sure that people understand that this is their House and those committees are there for them. We're there to listen to them and to bring their voices back to the Ontario Legislature.

At the finance committee in Ottawa, one woman stood out for me. She was literally shaking with fear as she told her personal story about what it was like to live on ODSP, how the only time she sees people is when she is on public transit and why that money was so important to her. I just think that it takes such courage to speak out and stand up and share your personal story. But there is risk; there is risk in doing that. I think that Bill 52 will mitigate some of that risk for some people in the province as they stand up for their communities and for the causes that they genuinely believe in.

The second flaw is that it does not specify timelines for filing of a responding affidavit by the plaintiff or mention anything about the defendant filing additional affidavits as per the panel recommendations. The timing is always a concern for people who are involved in these issues, and it doesn't reverse the onus of proof.

I also want to make mention and pose a question for the House on Bill 52: Why was the retroactive clause removed from Bill 52? If it's the right thing to do going forward, why can't you look back and say, retroactively, these cases happened and litigation was pursued, so why can't we right those wrongs as well? So that question is outstanding for us in this party, and I think that actually it demands some attention. We will push that as it gets to committee.

Everyone who has actually stood up in this House thus far has a personal story to share, if it's from the wind turbines—and up until the end point, the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound had my full attention. But on the wind turbines, it's true that if there was proper public consultation beforehand, and if that consultation process was respectful of those voices in those communities, then you wouldn't have the tension. You wouldn't have the litigation, and you wouldn't have people pursuing and conflict and tension and threatening people's livelihoods and their homes. It just wouldn't happen. In general, I feel that was a completely avoidable situation. If the Green Energy Act had been put into place with some forethought and almost some integrity, then we wouldn't have had that tension. It's a real shame, actually, because it's a lost opportunity to move towards a green energy plan for this province which actually would make a huge difference.

The flaws exist, but they can be fixed; almost everything can be fixed. But there are some things that are outstanding that will affect the way that the strategic lawsuits are actually formed. I'm particularly thinking about the way that Ontario is growing and the way that land planning is actually happening in the province. It's hard for us, of course, not to think of Line 9, for instance, and the way that communities are affected by different points of legislation across this country.

In Kitchener–Waterloo, we have such an active community that's very engaged, very informed. They keep their politicians working all the time, and that's the way it's supposed to be. That's what we signed up for too, by the way. But the way that Line 9 and the group of activists who have mobilized around that pipeline going through very fragile and vulnerable land across the riding and also around the Grand River—a lot of people don't understand it. I think there are 27 watershed MPPs, so there are MPPs who have conservation areas and major bodies of water—which essentially keep the province alive, because we need water. That hasn't changed, Mr. Speaker. We need water. It doesn't matter how much money you have. If you don't have clean water, it doesn't really matter.

So we have a lot of people in our riding who have come to visit me and gone to visit the other MPPs. They have made a very compelling case for caution on Line 9 and for due diligence, quite honestly. Please remember that there has not been a comprehensive environmental assessment of this pipeline.

The reason I raise this around Bill 52 is that there's one woman who has spoken up. She has been very vigilant. Her name is Louise Lanteigne. She has been very active on conservation, on species protection, on mitigating the negative impacts of growth on our communities. I've known her for a long time. It's interesting because she has been successful. She was able to “delay the project earlier this year when she raised concerns about emergency shut-off valve placement along the line, arguing there was only one valve near the Grand River.

“On October 6, the NEB ruled that Enbridge”—who is, of course, the distributor—“did not meet the requirement for safety and said it was not persuaded Enbridge had done enough to protect the environment in the event of a pipeline rupture.”

Activists can really serve their communities very well. But as I said, there's risk in doing so. This particular woman—I'm quoting this from the Waterloo Chronicle; James Jackson has written this, and it's a matter of public record: “Some of the information is related to her intervener status on the Line 9 reversal project”—has really become an issue and a topic of conversation because she actually initiated an access to information request with the National Energy Board, requesting any and all records that mention her by name. Just this last October, she received a computer disc with more than 1,000 pages of information, including inter-office National Energy Board emails, media mentions and even her activity on Twitter.

1650

You have the National Energy Board monitoring an individual, an activist, more so than they were monitoring the pipeline. That should raise some concerns for all of us, I would think, Mr. Speaker. She has been threatened with legal action against her by developers in the past. The community has rallied, I think, on the whole.

Fear shouldn't be the dominant emotion when you decide to take a principled stand on the environment or on a just cause or on an energy issue. Fear should not be

the dominant emotion. Ironically, this is what I'm most afraid of: that fear is becoming a tool in our political arena, if you will, and fear in division, actually. So there is a very good reason to move forward with Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act. It has taken some time to get here, but I think it will be welcomed by many in our communities.

There's a really interesting thing happening in the province of Ontario right now. Social media has broadened our understanding of issues. I think you have to be careful because you have to be selective of what you read and what you believe, but it has given some new energy to activists, who are just actually normal people who care deeply about something. That's a good thing, Mr. Speaker, because there's a lot going on in the province right now.

It's hard for me not to reflect on Bill C-51, actually, which is happening at the federal level, Mr. Harper's bill. In the context of how you protect the rights of citizens within the province and within the country, I think that Bill C-51 is the antithesis to Bill 52. Ironically, they're 51 and 52. Bill C-51, of course, criminalizes political activism. It gives police wide-ranging powers of arrest. It allows warrantless CSIS spying on Canadian citizens. Most importantly, it vaguely—vaguely—defines terrorism. Even the Canadian Privacy Commissioner said that in his mind, it goes too far. When you have an independent officer of the Canadian Parliament speaking out against a piece of legislation like Bill C-51, then I think that we should be paying attention to that.

There's always this delicate balance between the rights of citizens and the power and authority of government. Government in this instance, by bringing in a piece of legislation which can protect those voices, those voices that have the courage to stand up and speak and that will not be silenced into submission around public consultation, for instance—that's a good piece of legislation that I think we can make stronger.

In Waterloo, it's also really interesting—and this is where you're going to have a convergence of legislation, policy and communities speaking up. I think that this is healthy. I think it's healthy for our democracy to happen. But look at the good-places-to-grow piece of legislation, for instance, which has identified certain communities across the province and said, “This community must intensify and grow in a certain way”—grow up instead of growing out, which makes sense for all sorts of reasons that I think all of us should fully understand. Then you have the Ontario Municipal Board, for instance. It was interesting that the minister without portfolio raised the OMB in his community of St. Catharines. He also looked at the people who are on those Ontario Municipal Boards. What I've learned, as the finance critic and Treasury Board critic for the NDP, is that not only do you have to follow the money at this place, you also have to follow the people. Who has influence? Who's getting appointed to boards? Who's making decisions? Who has this past history at a company and then gets appointed to a public board? Because they bring that philosophy with them.

In Waterloo, this is a case that sets precedent for the entire province of Ontario. The Waterloo region did a very good job of doing a review of how their citizens are going to be looking at housing, for instance. They're not looking for the suburban sprawl, two-storey, three-bedroom houses anymore, because they're aging and they're looking to be down in the core, where we're building the LRT.

The Ontario Municipal Board was approached by the developers because they didn't like the region's plan. The region, which did its due diligence—as municipally elected politicians, they developed a strategy to only grow to 86 acres. The developers, of course, didn't like that. They weren't willing to adapt their business plan, although some of them did. I have to be clear: There are some very progressive developers in Waterloo region who have looked at the core and said, "You know what? We can build very innovative, creative, energy-efficient, very progressive housing options and make a lot of money." So they adapted their plans.

But there are still the developers who just want to keep building over all that beautiful farmland on an aquifer that provides water for the entire Grand River area, the Waterloo-Wellington area. The aquifer there is so important. There's just too much to risk.

So you have a region, a municipality, conforming to a piece of provincial legislation, Places to Grow, and then you have developers going to the Ontario Municipal Board saying, "We don't like the Places to Grow plan and the region of Waterloo's plan," and the OMB overruled the regional government and so completely undermined democracy in a holistic way.

Ironically, the government, of course, didn't like that that happened as well. So there, you've appealed. You have a government appealing a decision made by the Ontario Municipal Board to uphold their own piece of legislation, and you have activists caught in this crazy web. It should not have got this far, because the Ontario Municipal Board ruled in favour of the developers and said, "Take an additional 1,000 hectares on it"—it's not acres; it's hectares—which is huge, which costs the existing taxpayers money. It has environmental costs. It has planning consequences. How can that happen?

Of course you have activists who have raised their concerns about this, because, as I mentioned, there is more than just the financial cost of infrastructure that we can't afford to maintain and uphold, and you have the environmental costs of really irresponsible planning.

This piece of legislation would protect them. It would protect them against some very big players. The member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound criticizes us for—I mean, that's what they are. They have a lot of money. They have deep pockets. They do. They can be part of the solution, but what the government's job is, by bringing in legislation, and what our job is, as an opposition party, is to ensure that there is legislation which levels the playing field, if you will, because it needs to be levelled. The voices and the citizens of these communities who care deeply about their community—and

they don't want to see sprawling growth or irresponsible energy pipelines going through their community, because they've weighed the risk, and they feel that the risk for them is to stand up and speak out. A piece of legislation which at least protects them to actually do that is a good piece of legislation, and, as I said, we can do better.

I really want to end by just commenting on Commissioner Gord Miller, what he wrote on this. He said, "The public's right to participate in decision-making over matters of public interest is a cornerstone of our democratic system. Efforts aimed at suppressing this right should be discouraged by the Ontario Legislature and other public agencies. The" environmental commissioner "sees a need for provincial legislation that would put both sides of development disputes on equal footing. Such legislation could serve to halt SLAPP suits in their tracks."

I think that Bill 52 is a very good place to start. I think that there are some gaps in it, as I've already identified, that we can actually strengthen at committee. I hope that the government is receptive to that, because it doesn't make any sense to bring a piece of legislation which still has weak spots, because it took so long to get here. It took so long to get to March 2015 after the panel made their recommendations in 2010. Why not move this forward, address the weaknesses at committee and get it done—get it done the right way—so that citizens in this province feel empowered and supported to stand up and speak out on issues that they care deeply about?

1700

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: I rise to support Bill 52, the anti-SLAPP Protection of Public Participation Act. Using intimidation tactics to silence one's opponent is a misuse of our court system, one of the central institutions of a fair and democratic society. By protecting citizens against strategic litigation, our government is protecting the right of Ontario residents to speak out on matters that are important to us.

If passed, this legislation would allow courts to quickly identify and deal with strategic lawsuits, minimizing the emotional and financial strain on defendants, as well as the waste of court resources. We're proposing a made-in-Ontario approach to addressing the issue of strategic lawsuits, based on consensus recommendations of an expert advisory panel and extensive stakeholder consultation.

Our proposed legislation strikes a balance that will help ensure abusive litigation is stopped but legitimate actions can continue. Anyone who has a legitimate claim of libel or slander should not be discouraged by this legislation. Protecting public debate is part of Ontario's comprehensive strategy to build Better Justice Together.

Bill 83 died when the Legislature was dissolved pending the last general election. Bill 52 was introduced in the House on December 1, 2014. If passed, this legislation will protect the right of Ontario residents to speak out on matters that are important to us.

What is different about this new legislation? The current bill includes a few minor amendments to clarify the appeal process respecting decisions to (a) dismiss lawsuits as a strategic lawsuit and (b) stay related administrative proceedings; limit the amount and time spent on cross-examinations to seven hours per side, rather than one day per party; apply the legislation only to those lawsuits begun after the introduction of the bill so as not to interfere with ongoing litigation; and change the effective date of the bill to the date of royal assent instead of proclamation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: I'm pleased to stand here and comment on the speech by the member from Kitchener-Waterloo. I'd just like to tell the member from Kitchener-Waterloo that I was in her riding last week for the university curling that is going on at the K-W Granite Club. It was quite a contest going on and a lot of enthusiasm. The K-W Granite Club certainly is doing a great job with that event.

I think we've listened to this debate all afternoon and I certainly don't want to speak to the Premier's lawsuit; all the members of this House know what's going on there. I'm certainly not going to speak about the four OPP investigations going on; all the members of the House know that this is going on. And I'm certainly not going to comment on the recordings that the OPP have over the Sudbury by-election.

I think any legislation that goes through this House has to be fair to everybody. There have been some suggestions that maybe this isn't with this bill, and maybe in committee they can get this straightened out when it gets there.

It wouldn't surprise me at all, with what's been going on in the last number of years, whether it dies again on the order paper because of the actions of the government and some of their previous dealings with this type of thing, and also that they just maybe don't want to get involved with this legislation at this point in time. So it wouldn't surprise me if this dies again on the order paper.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It is indeed again an honour to stand in this House and bring forth the voices of my constituents in Windsor-Tecumseh, especially to make reference to my colleague from Kitchener-Waterloo. I have to admit that when she was speaking, I had a chill go through me because she spoke about one her constituents; I believe her name is Louise Lanteigne. This lady has not been hit with a SLAPP suit, but the National Energy Board has gathered 1,031 pages of documents which reference her name in her fight to stop or delay Line 9, the oil pipeline. If a lawsuit is launched and you've got to go out and hire a lawyer, and the first thing you have to give the lawyer is more than 1,000 pages for review, look at the added cost there. I agree with her when she says that the National Energy Board is spending more time monitoring her than they are the Line 9 pipeline. It's scary, Speaker; it really is.

Here's somebody who has intervener status trying to delay that, and she did because she pointed out, quite rightfully so, that at the Grand River there was only one emergency shut-off valve, and that's a scary thing. That should send a chill through us all that they were going to put this pipeline through—I think it was 300,000 barrels of oil a day going through there—with one emergency shut-off valve at the Grand River in Kitchener-Waterloo. When they gather that kind of information about somebody through media reports, that this lady is standing up for her community—if that ever got to a lawsuit, the cost of that would be tremendous. We should all be very concerned about that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bas Balkissoon: I'm glad to be given the opportunity to add a few comments to the member for Kitchener-Waterloo.

In my previous two minutes, I mentioned I was involved in an issue back in 1985. In 1988, I joined municipal council, and some of my colleagues here spent a lot of years on municipal council. It's kind of interesting listening to everybody in the chamber speak on this particular bill, the Protection of Public Participation Act. If you look back in history, the creation of the OMB has led to this issue because the OMB was created as a quasi-judicial body. It wasn't meant to have lawyers, but the development industry has been so savvy over the years that they've brought lawyers into the system. Right now, the OMB is really not a judicial system that is supposed to be quasi-, supposed to be friendly; it's a court. Unfortunately, it has led to some of these letters from lawyers to residents who want to do the right thing for their community.

This bill has been a long-standing problem. Many of the people who spoke before have mentioned that this bill has been introduced more than once. In fact, this is the fourth time. Everybody's speaking positively about the bill, so I hope this time around we'll get it on to committee. We will cut off debate soon and let the committee deal with it quickly. We have an opportunity in this session of the Legislature to approve something. Let us approve it.

But I'm going to tell you the truth, Mr. Speaker. I know everybody's saying the bill's not perfect, and we'll correct it at committee. But I have my doubts that it will solve the problem 100% because the OMB with lawyers still exists. I have no confidence that this is going to solve it. This is just one tool in the arsenal of tools that we're giving communities to defend themselves, and I hope it works.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our questions and comments. We return to the member for Kitchener-Waterloo for her response.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you to the members from York Centre—who didn't reference my comments, but I'll forgive you because it's your birthday, and every day is a good day; right, Monte?—Perth-Wellington, Windsor-Tecumseh and Scarborough-Rouge River. I

must confess I didn't mean to cause chills, but I'll take it, I guess.

It's really interesting to hear the member from Scarborough—Rouge River, who referenced my comments, which I thank you for—because the Ontario Municipal Board is a serious issue. I mean, they are creating policy on the side, almost, by overruling local municipalities. I agree with you: They were never meant to lawyer up and work against the people in their communities. The people who sit on those Ontario municipal boards were supposed to level the playing field—find the balance, if it exists.

1710

That's not what happened in Waterloo region at all. The research, the evidence—any reasonable group of people would realize that Waterloo region cannot afford to grow an additional 1,000 hectares. We don't have the money to build the infrastructure. We don't have the money to maintain the infrastructure that we have right now. There's a cost, right?

It's interesting that you mentioned that, but the government had the ability to do an operational review of the Ontario Municipal Board in this last round, and you didn't do that. So if you want to fix the problem, then you actually have to conduct a thorough review of the OMBs. We would support you in that.

You'll remember Rosario Marchese, the former member. He's passionate about Ontario municipal boards, and hopefully—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: God bless.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Yes. As he would say, God bless.

I want to leave you with one quote: The surveillance state “is not intended to stop terrorism. It's intended to control the population.” Noam Chomsky said that.

I think that we have to be very careful, as we move forward in creating legislation, to find the balance but respect the citizens that we all serve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Hon. Jeff Leal: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to let you know that I'll be sharing my time with the very distinguished gentleman from Northumberland—Quinte West and the Minister of Education, my colleague Liz Sandals, the member from Guelph.

I would like to call Bill 52 the Tie Domi bill, and I'll let you know why I call it that. You've seen the TV commercials with Tie Domi taking on the big telephone companies, right? You know, the little guy is finally getting a chance to take on the big telephone companies, and Mr. Domi is right in the middle. This bill kind of represents what Mr. Domi is all about in that TV commercial. He, of course, had a very distinguished career with the Peterborough Petes. He played on a line with Mike Ricci, who had a very distinguished NHL career, and Chris Longo.

While I'm talking about the Petes, I'll just take a moment to congratulate my good friend the coach, Jody Hull, who led the Petes into the playoffs. They then

finished eighth in the eastern conference. They will be starting with the overwhelming favourites, the Oshawa Generals, in the not-too-distant future. I do know Jody really well, and he'll have them ready.

I'm getting in a little plug for my hometown hockey team. Then I can get on to Bill 52, or the Tie Domi bill.

This is a very important piece of legislation. It has been in front of this House on four occasions, but this is the opportunity. We sense we're getting co-operation from the official opposition and the third party to make this bill a reality.

Having served in municipal politics for some 18 years, between 1985 and 2003, I do know the sense of threats that can be out there, with people trying to stop democracy in action with the threat of a lawsuit.

We have talked about the Ontario Municipal Board. I'd be remiss if I didn't say that one outstanding member of the OMB right now is a former, and the longest-serving, mayor in the history of the city of Peterborough, one Sylvia Sutherland. Sylvia is the kind of person who you want on the Ontario Municipal Board: a former mayor; understands planning; understands the process. Frankly, I'm told that her deliberations have been very sound when she has been selected to do OMB hearings right across the province of Ontario.

I had the great privilege of serving with her for 12 of my 18 years on Peterborough city council. She's an example of an individual on the OMB who understands the process.

I do know that there have been some challenges with the OMB, particularly with previous appointees, who tended to be lawyers. Some of them came out of the development industry and didn't have the broad perspective that is needed when you're filling an OMB position.

In fact, the history of the OMB is very interesting. It was brought in by Leslie Frost when he was Premier of the province of Ontario in the early 1950s. He brought it in to act as a buffer, in those days, against the development industry, challenging municipal councils in terms of their deliberations. I just wanted to give a little of that history.

What we're proposing here today is a made-in-Ontario solution, this anti-SLAPP legislation. I think it will strengthen democracy in the province of Ontario and it's time, with the co-operation of everybody—we're just getting back after a constituency-week break. My friend from Sarnia—Lambton: That gentleman, I know, wants to co-operate on this bill. I've heard great eloquence from the third party this afternoon, that they want to get this bill moving forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll certainly turn it over to my good friend and colleague, the chair of our rural caucus, the wonderful member from Northumberland—Quinte West.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Northumberland—Quinte West.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: What an introduction from the Minister of Agriculture. I hope we can publish that live somewhere.

Speaker, I'm not a lawyer or a judge, but it's not hard to see sometimes how things get derailed. I too spent some 12 years in the municipal sector and have seen some of these actions that result in intimidation. Frankly, I will refer to Mr. and Mr. Smith, who would have some difficulty even understanding what they were faced with.

My good friend from Peterborough said it's been four times. I hope four times lucky; it's supposed to be three times lucky, but we're going to give another one to benefit.

Hon. Jeff Leal: You're right: It's four times lucky.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: That's right. We'll take a little bit longer. We want to be cautious.

I've heard this afternoon, for the time I was here, that in general there's some consensus. I'm a bit leery because we've heard those famous words before. It seems, for whatever reason—and I certainly don't want to point fingers—that some folks just want to debate for the sake of debating while Mr. and Mrs. Smith wait for us to create laws to protect them, to protect the public. This is what this piece of legislation really does.

I'm hopeful that once we reach—and we have to have adequate debate. Let's be reasonable, we shouldn't short-change anybody—and that this goes to committee, because frankly, in any committee I've sat on for the eight or nine years I've spent in this place—I tell people that's really where a lot of the work gets done, because you're able to listen to interested parties that are not allowed to come to this House to debate with us, but give us their good input; and all three parties have an opportunity to look at what this should look like at the end of the day.

I'm just going to take a minute to review what really the intent of this piece of legislation is. We live in a very fair and democratic society, although sometimes we wonder, but we do. I think we need to protect that a little bit more. We can speak out on matters that are important to us. By protecting citizens against strategic litigation, the government is standing up for those values. I think it's important we do that. Frankly, Speaker, that's what the people of Ontario want, that's what they cherish.

Using intimidation tactics to silence someone's opponents is a misuse of our court system. It's one of the central institutions of a fair and democratic society. That's the democratic piece. I think that's one of those signatures that, as Ontarians, as Canadians, we need to be proud of, and sometimes we take that too much for granted. We need to remember that.

If passed, this legislation will allow the courts to quickly identify and deal with strategic lawsuits, minimizing the emotional and financial strains for defendants as well as the waste of court resources. Now, we hear over and over again, Speaker, is this something that's going to fix all those problems that we've encountered? I would say not, but I think it creates an opportunity to make those circumstances better.

1720

I think this proposed legislation, once again, if passed, strikes somewhat of a real balance that will help to

ensure that abusive litigation is stopped but that legitimate action can continue, because we don't want to go too far to the other side. We've got to leave the opportunity for that to still happen. So I think it's important that we do this.

I think we need to look at this piece of legislation as it strikes that balance, at the end of the day, after public hearings. What we'll end up with is a made-in-Ontario approach that suits our needs as Ontarians in addressing these issues with the strategic lawsuits. It will have some opportunity to build on consensus. As I said before, it's something that—I think everybody strives to get there. At the same time, we need to protect public debate, which is part of our comprehensive strategy to build a better justice system.

Speaker, you've heard some references made to the OMB. I think the OMB, although sometimes somewhat cumbersome, does serve that purpose. Unfortunately, sometimes we use a sledgehammer to deal with an issue that, frankly, could be resolved in a strategic manner. By passing this legislation, I think it will take some of the pressures off the OMB to try to resolve some of these issues.

As we go ahead with this debate, I would really ask all the members of this House to look at the end result. I think sometimes we focus too much on trying to have a magic bullet that fixes all the problems, and that the problems will go away. But I think we need to focus: Is this the right approach to go from point A to point B? Frankly, point A is not sustainable. The leader of the NDP, some time back, introduced a piece of legislation similar to what we're debating today.

I think this will really play a role in trying to mitigate some of those issues that, frankly, even through an OMB process, will try to smooth that process.

Speaker, as I finish my remarks here, I just hope that we use some common sense to get from point A to point B, knowing that it might not fix all the problems but certainly will smooth that road to move forward.

At this time, I will turn it over to my good friend the Minister of Education to take on the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm very happy to participate in the debate on Bill 52 this afternoon.

It's interesting: We've been referring to this as the anti-SLAPP legislation, but I think it's actually important to go back and look at the real title, which is the Protection of Public Participation Act.

We've heard lots of examples here this afternoon, listening to the debate: issues around development, issues around gravel pits, issues around transit or roads, issues around pipelines, issues around development in agricultural areas, and environmental issues. On all these issues, there is a real public interest in having a public debate about the pros and the cons of whatever is the issue that's under debate.

We want to ensure, to protect our democratic institutions, and quite frankly, to arrive at good, considered

conclusions to the debate, that we actually have mechanisms to involve the public and to allow the public to comment and to have the public bring forward their ideas about how various issues can be resolved.

So as it says in the name of the act, the goal of the act is to protect public participation. The problem we're addressing here is that sometimes the developer or the proponent of whatever developer slaps a lawsuit on whoever is disagreeing with them, the public participant, to try and shut them down because they're afraid of the lawsuit, they're afraid of the litigation, they're afraid that they're being charged with libel or defamation or whatever, and somebody slaps a frivolous lawsuit on.

Back in 2010, the issue started to arise as to whether this was actually a problem in Ontario and in Canada. Fortunately, I guess, we often seem in Canada and in Ontario to lag the litigation history in the US. But it seems that unfortunately where people in the US come up with some new reason to sue each other, give it a few years and we seem to pick up the practice in Ontario. So the issue arose: Are strategic lawsuits a problem in Ontario?

At that point, back in 2010, the Ministry of the Attorney General actually convened an expert panel to look at the issue of strategic lawsuits and to recommend steps that could be taken to prevent them. After extensive consultations—public participation, if you will—the panel concluded that strategic lawsuits are indeed a problem in Ontario, potentially deterring significant numbers of people from speaking out on matters of public interest. We don't know the definite number of lawsuits, because when you table a strategic lawsuit, you don't stick a little gold sticker on it saying, "Hi, I'm a strategic lawsuit." That just simply is a characterization. But what the panel was able to determine was that while these suits are not labelled as strategic lawsuits when they're filed with the court, nevertheless they were strategic lawsuits, and it has become a problem. Hence, what we've got here today is Bill 52.

As has been noted several times, this is actually the fourth incarnation of this bill: twice as a private member's bill and now this is the second government bill version. Hopefully this time it won't die on the order paper, we won't get prorogued and there won't be an election, and we will actually get around to passing this bill.

But I think there has actually been a really interesting debate here this afternoon on some of the pros and cons when you're dealing with anti-SLAPP legislation, because the thing that you want to make sure of is that while you protect the public participant from a frivolous lawsuit by a developer or a company, you don't go too far and make a company or a developer open to litigation or lack of remedy when somebody is interfering with a legitimate business enterprise. I think it has really been interesting to hear the debate go back and forth this afternoon with people talking about the possibilities.

I think what's important here is that we can have confidence that the panel that was appointed by the Ministry of the Attorney General very much turned their

mind to the fairness issue, that we need to have a balanced approach that is fair to both the democratic participants at the community level and whoever is the proponent of the project that is under debate, and that we can be assured that the proposed law—which actually does put into law a number of the recommendations that have come from the panel; that in fact that is where we're going, and that we do have a fair and reasonable definition of what is a strategic lawsuit and when this law would click in. Quite frankly, if there's a little bit of fine-tuning that's needed, if we get this through second reading, it can go to committee, and if people still have concerns that it needs fine-tuning at the committee stage, we can do that.

1730

I would encourage everyone in this House to vote for this legislation. I'm quite encouraged by a number of the comments that I've heard this afternoon, and thank the Attorney General for bringing this legislation forward yet again.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the speech by the Minister of Agriculture, the member from Northumberland—Quinte West and the Minister of Education.

From the perspective as the northern critic of the Progressive Conservative Party, I did earlier raise some concerns put forward by the Ontario Forest Industries Association, particularly with regard to the definition of "public interest." They are concerned about how vague the definition is at this point, and they're concerned about how this legislation, in its current form, could negatively affect 170,000 forest jobs, primarily in northern Ontario. That's a huge concern for me.

I've also received correspondence from FONOM, the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities, and they have made a number of recommendations to try to improve the bill, especially in terms of clarifying the intent of the legislation and classifying who it protects. I'll quote from their letter to me:

"We believe the proposed legislation would be strengthened by specifying that the intent of the law is to protect individuals and citizens whose public participation is in good faith and factual in nature." They go on to say, "Specifically, Bill 52 would be enhanced if it specified that the legislation was intended to cover individuals and groups that are voluntary in nature, have annual operating budgets below a specified threshold, perhaps \$100,000, and do not have a legal counsel engaged either pro bono or as a cost to the individual or to the group." I think that is an excellent recommendation.

I look forward to having an opportunity to speak more fully to this bill, where I will concentrate on the Ontario Forest Industries Association's and FONOM's concerns, as well as others. I know the member from Nipissing also looks forward to having an opportunity, and I assume the member from Timmins—James Bay, a northern member, will look forward to speaking to this bill to bring some northern issues to the floor of the Legislature.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Paul Miller: Just to get a plug in, like the member from Peterborough likes to do, I'd just let him know that the Belleville Bulls are now moving to Hamilton. They'll become the Hamilton Bulldogs and certainly are going to be competitive next year in the OHL.

Mr. Steve Clark: A Hamilton bulldog just like you.

Mr. Paul Miller: That's right: competitive.

Speaker, in reference to the anti-SLAPP bill, over the years when I sat on council and I was on the conservation authority, we saw lots of anti-SLAPP legislation in place which caused a lot of problems in our community in reference to silencing public opinion, silencing good information that would come forward with the threat of being sued by the proponent. I also saw many occasions where our liaison committees that were appointed by the company and the Ministry of the Environment to oversee such projects—that even some of the members on the public liaison committee were threatened with lawsuits if the company didn't like what they said.

So this type of legislation is good, but like the members have all said, when it goes to committee, it certainly needs some fine-tuning. I can see some things wrong with it that I'd like to see fixed, because these corporations, with their expensive lawyers, are experts at finding loopholes in any legislation. It doesn't matter whether it comes federally, provincially or municipally.

I would like to see this thing with a fine-tooth comb through it before we actually make it law. I don't want any people coming in the back door to obstruct and ruin public opinion, because I believe the people in Ontario have a right to speak out when they believe something is wrong and something that they want to have partial input and control over in their communities.

I think this type of legislation is good. I want to see more of it, because it's been too long that we have seen people who have been silenced who have a lot to offer to our society and our community.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: It gives me great pleasure to rise in the House today to speak on this particular bill, on Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act.

One of the greatest things about living in a fair and democratic society is that we can speak on matters that are important to us. By protecting citizens against strategic litigation, our government is standing up for the values the people of Ontario cherish.

I know that the constituents of my riding of Davenport are a very engaged, very informed group of constituents, constituents who have an opinion and want their opinion to be heard, an opinion that I am interested in hearing and encourage all that type of engagement in my constituency.

Using intimidation tactics to silence one's opponents is a misuse of our court system, one of the central institutions of a fair and democratic society. If passed,

this legislation would allow courts to quickly identify and deal with strategic lawsuits, minimizing the emotional and financial strain on defendants, as well as the waste of court resources. Our proposed legislation strikes a balance that will help ensure abusive litigation is stopped but legitimate actions can continue.

This proposed legislation is about preventing strategic lawsuits. Anyone who has a legitimate claim of libel or slander should not be discouraged by this legislation. If passed, this law would encourage healthy debate on issues of public interest by reducing the risks that citizens could be threatened with legal action when voicing legitimate viewpoints.

We're proposing a made-in-Ontario approach to address the issue of strategic lawsuits based on consensus recommendations of an expert advisory panel and extensive stakeholder consultations. Protecting public debate is part of Ontario's comprehensive strategy to build Better Justice Together.

It has been a pleasure to speak on this this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Again, it's a pleasure to rise in the House and speak on this legislation and on the comments from the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the member for Northumberland—Quinte West and the Minister of Education.

Speaker, we have been hearing about public participation throughout this debate, and that's certainly something that I want to see encouraged and all governments actively pursue that.

There's a sense in the riding sometimes that people are afraid to voice their opinions in case they upset somebody. There's also a feeling sometimes that they're afraid to ask questions, which they shouldn't be, because there is no bad question. There's a sense in the riding that the people are afraid to do this with governments. So I would suggest that the legislation has to be properly put forward, properly done and fair to all sides.

We've seen what this government has done, and this has been previously mentioned with the Green Energy Act, where it has taken away the rights of municipalities to plan their own futures and the grief and the concern that has been brought to the municipalities over the Green Energy Act.

So when this government says that they want to have legislation, and they put it forward for debate, and they say that they want to make it fair for everybody, I think we have to be careful with that statement, because we've seen in the past, especially with the Green Energy Act, that that hasn't been the case. So we have to certainly scrutinize this bill when it's in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to respond.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I want to thank the very distinguished honourable members from Parry Sound—Muskoka, Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Davenport and the concluding comments made by the member from Perth—Wellington.

No doubt about it; I think there's a consensus building in this House that Bill 52 needs to move forward. I'm old enough to remember the series on TV called *Get Smart*. I remember the cone of silence. Without this legislation, far too often, we're going to see the cone of silence coming over groups in the province of Ontario. This, in many ways, is a bill to remove the cone of silence in the province of Ontario. That's why we need to move this legislation forward.

1740

Interjections.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I hear some interesting comments from the members opposite.

This is a very important piece of legislation because, in my view, this legislation will help to strengthen the democratic process in the province of Ontario. We're at our best in this House when the opposition can come forward, and the third party and the government, to effectively achieve a consensus.

I look forward to this bill getting to committee. We'll have the opportunity to accept presentations from a wide variety of groups across the province of Ontario, groups like the forestry industry from northern Ontario, to sit down and make presentations. As the member from Hamilton East-Stoney Creek said in his very eloquent two minutes, we need to do some fine tuning on this particular bill, and we will take that opportunity, Mr. Speaker. The best legislation is when all sides can build it together. On Bill 52, we're going to reach that target.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Ottawa South on a point of order.

Mr. John Fraser: I misspoke earlier today and referred to the former member from Parry Sound-Muskoka; it's actually the former member from Brampton West-Mississauga.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Pursuant to standing order 47(c), I am now required to interrupt the proceedings and announce that there has been more than six and one-half hours of debate on the motion for second reading of this bill. This debate will therefore be deemed adjourned unless the government House leader specifies otherwise.

I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: We wish the debate to continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I certainly thank the government member for that motion. I've been working on a speech all weekend. There's 20 minutes on the clock—

Interjections.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I'm not kidding.

I really do appreciate the opportunity to address Bill 52, the Protection of Public Participation Act. It's also known as the anti-SLAPP lawsuit bill, as we have heard many times over this afternoon.

My concern, as with so many people in this House, is partly personal. Previously, I did correct my record that I

am not named in a lawsuit for \$226 billion; I'm named in a lawsuit for \$260 billion.

It's not on my shoulders alone. As I recall—this has been on my mind for, I guess, seven years now—there's maybe 20 of us named, several elected representatives in Haldimand and in Brant county and Brantford.

This one came in the front door of my office. It really did upset my staff at the time. At least it didn't arrive in my mailbox at the farm. My wife picks up the mail. She's the one who gets the eviction notices.

All of this relates to the Caledonia Six Nations issue. Oftentimes, she goes down to get the mail, and the mailbox is not there. It's in the ditch; sometimes the mailbox and the post are in the ditch. I have a record—

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Talk to the road grader about that.

Mr. Toby Barrett: No, it's not the road grader. I can assure you of that. If the road grader did that, they wouldn't paint a message on the pavement out in front of the mailbox. The guy running the road grader would not put the large incendiary devices inside the mailbox either. But I'm not here to talk about how I receive my information.

The reason that I was in that lawsuit related to the Caledonia Six Nations issue, which I consider the mother of all scandals—we think of eHealth: Nobody has written a book about eHealth yet. Ornge: Nobody has written a book about Ornge. The gas plant scandal: Nobody has written a book about that. The Sudbury scandal: Maybe someone's working on a book. There are no books out on that scandal. The Caledonia Six Nations scandal: There have now been at least four books written about that issue, and I recommend that you take a look at these four books, written from all perspectives—the mother of all scandals.

Interjection.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yes, he's looking for something to do.

More specifically to the SLAPP tactics, for me, this goes back to 2008 during public hearings. That's when I first heard the expression. We were having public hearings on the Lake Simcoe Protection Act. That bill at the time was Bill 99. We called it the Wayne Gretzky bill. That was eight years ago. We still don't have this in place as yet; it has been introduced four times.

Just going back to that Lake Simcoe confrontation, much of it focused on Big Bay Point on Lake Simcoe. You can read about the lawsuits and the bitter feud between cottagers and developers. Anyone who is interested in getting a journalist's take on what was going on there, take a look at *Toronto Life* magazine. There's an article by Paul Wilson, and it's titled "The Battle over Lake Simcoe." We're told in the article in *Toronto Life* that in that battle, at that point—now, that was eight years ago when that the article came out—there were \$255 million in lawsuits. One person who approached the witness table before our committee was subject to a \$1-million lawsuit, which was felt to be a SLAPP lawsuit. I know, from the committee, that it did have an impact on

that person. They testified anyway, but they were subject to that kind of intimidation in what was referred to at the time as the mother of all development wars.

Then we had recent mention of northern Ontario, the ongoing war in the woods. I was with the Mike Harris government a number of years ago, and we resolved much of that at that time with our approach to northern Ontario. But we do see the other side of the story. We heard from one of the members about the concerns of the Ontario Forest Industries Association with this SLAPP legislation, and the concerns of FONOM, the municipal organization. So there is the other side of the story.

In a case, Greenpeace, as I'm told, launched a series of frivolous actions or complaints against a forest company. It was Resolute Forest Products. They were harvesting trees, making paper and selling the paper to Best Buy, a retail store chain. Greenpeace asked Resolute to not harvest the forest in, I think, half of northern Ontario, or Greenpeace would pressure their customer Best Buy to not use their paper. Resolute did sign an agreement with Greenpeace stating that they would do as Greenpeace asked if Greenpeace agreed to stop their negative campaign against Best Buy.

Two weeks later, Greenpeace started up this aggressive negative campaign again, targeting the customers of Best Buy: "Don't buy these paper products." Resolute, in turn—they had the right to their day in court—filed a lawsuit against Greenpeace for breach of contract and damages. From what I understand, this is a legitimate lawsuit by a company against an environmental organization.

We know that this is going to committee. We support this legislation with some caveats, and I do hope some appropriate safeguards are put in place so we don't go too far the other way. We do have to achieve some balance to ensure that those appropriate or legitimate lawsuits can go forward. In our society, we do have the right to have our day in court.

We see the support for this Liberal bill—and I'm just trying to read between the lines—from Greenpeace. We see support from Environmental Defence, Ecojustice, CELA—that's the Canadian Environmental Law Association—the Ontario Clean Air Alliance, the Council of Canadians, the Sierra Club and the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. So often they're on that list, and the list goes on and on. These groups support the legislation. As with a lot of the environmental legislation I've seen over the last 11 years, they've probably had a major hand in writing this legislation, and we can only trust that they got it right and did it in an unbiased way.

1750

Going back to the Lake Simcoe example, the war at Big Bay Point: This war was described as one of the messiest and most acrimonious in recent history. It was a compelling issue for so many people, people either trying to protect what they already had on the shoreline or trying to move forward with development, and it's unfortunate when it boils down to these kinds of lawsuits.

John Tory was our leader at the time. I remember at the time that he made an announcement that the PC

government would clean up Lake Simcoe. He was joined in that announcement by Garfield Dunlop from Simcoe North, Jim Wilson from Simcoe-Grey, Julia Munro from York North and also MPP Joe Tascona. I think I can mention his name, Speaker; he's not here now, but he represented Barrie-Simcoe-Bradford.

There was heavy involvement on our side. There was heavy involvement from the federal government, partly a \$30-million initiative through John Baird, who was environment minister at the time, and MPs around the lake: Bruce Stanton; Patrick Brown—there's a name that's a little more known now than six or nine months ago; Bev Oda, another name that ended up in the media; Barry Devolin and Peter Van Loan.

The downside were these kinds of lawsuits and the intimidation going on around the lake. At that time, on committee, we realized, I certainly realized, that these kinds of lawsuits that people were being exposed to—the sole purpose was to try to shut them up, to silence them or perhaps to punish them for holding an opposing viewpoint. I think we've heard the expression here about "litigation chill."

Part of what defines a SLAPP is that it is a meritless case and is intended more to intimidate or punish the defendant, rather than to seek justice for any wrong suffered by the plaintiff. Typically, these SLAPPs are withdrawn shortly before going to trial—I've had that experience with another lawsuit, now that I think about it—but by that time they've already served their purpose: They've forced the defendant to go through an extended period of duress, and often a great cost financially, to prepare for an impending court case.

Some of the things that I heard on that standing committee with respect to Lake Simcoe—first up, the first group that testified was the Innisfil District Association. It's a ratepayers' group with about 700 members. They had a very thorough report. The Innisfil group pointed out concerns with regard to some proposed alterations to the shoreline, and they stated that the project represented a situation where the developer was going to be allowed to dig an inland lake of 30 acres next to Lake Simcoe to accommodate 1,000 boats and a megamarina. That seemed a little over the top to us. This could present a further threat to, at that time, the deteriorating condition of Lake Simcoe.

As they indicated and asked us as a committee, "The government must provide protection for its citizens from strategic lawsuits." This was eight years ago. These are the SLAPPS, strategic lawsuits against public participation. They went on to say, "Lawsuits outstanding against our members, lawyers and other critics of the Big Bay Point projects now total over \$90 million." That's just the one ratepayer group of 700 people. I'm sure you can pass the hat, but \$90 million is a significant amount of money.

As they indicated, the Lake Simcoe Protection Act is "meaningless unless residents can speak out openly against projects that threaten the environment." That was eight years ago, Speaker, and the clock continues to tick

on this one. One of their recommendations at the time: "This government should move quickly, as Quebec has done, to guarantee that citizens be allowed to participate free from the chill of developer lawsuits."

I do recall that the presenter paused at the beginning, looked around somewhat furtively, looked at the audience behind him and indicated that he was, at the time, subject to a million-dollar lawsuit. I found that disturbing. I felt for him.

We were having these hearings just a few days after Remembrance Day. We all understand in this House why people stepped forward on our behalf and fought on our behalf, and it was to have those kinds of freedoms to not only assemble, like on the standing committee, but to be able to speak one's mind without any suggestion of intimidation.

I support this legislation with certain caveats. We're eight years down the road now. Bill 52, as we know, establishes a legal procedure. So often many of us are involved in public issues, but what the proponents can do is—those are the people fighting the issue with deep pockets—they can move it out of the public realm into the legal realm, where they clearly have the advantage.

So Bill 52, if it's enacted, allows people to prove, again before a judge, that the legal proceedings that are brought against them arise from a communication they made in good faith regarding the public interest, and if the judge is satisfied that this is the case, the legal proceedings would be dismissed as it would, in effect, be determined to be a SLAPP lawsuit. Of course, if the judge is not satisfied, the legal proceedings would continue on.

At the time—and I'm not up to date on this, but I did some work at the time eight years ago on the business of SLAPP—the province of Quebec had introduced legislation against this kind of intimidation. We asked our legislative researcher assigned at the time to the Standing Committee on General Government to provide us some information on these kinds of lawsuits. It was kind of a new thing for many of us. SLAPP was described as a term used to describe lawsuits initiated by plaintiffs, typically corporations, to stifle criticism of their actions. Such lawsuits are often filed in environmental or land disputes against members of the public or public interest organizations.

The legislative researcher made a number of points for us—again, this is back in 2008: (1) Very few of these SLAPPs end up going to trial. However—and this is understandable—critics charge that such suits are typical-

ly filed to divert the defendants' resources and shift the venue from the political to the legal realm, where the plaintiff enjoys the advantage.

(2) Most of these SLAPPs plead multiple causes of action, such as defamation, interference with contractual relations.

This was presented to the standing committee—(3) Defendants and other critics may become intimidated and cease their political interventions as a consequence.

The issue of intimidation: Again, that's somewhat dear to my heart. I've made reference to this before: As the representative of Haldimand county and Caledonia, I was formerly elected representative for much of Brant county. I represented New Credit reserve. I represented—six years.

I personally witnessed a significant amount of intimidation over the last nine years, and intimidation that in one way or another has been actually going on for well over 200 years with respect to land disputes, in this case specifically the Douglas Creek Estates subdivision down in the town of Caledonia. I made mention that you do pay the price when you speak out, and that applies to everybody in this House. I can put a dollar figure on one of my lawsuits, the \$260 billion. That would clear out my pension plan if I had one. I guess that applies to anyone else here.

It doesn't matter whether you're named in a million-dollar lawsuit—and I was named in one that was probably the value of my house at the time, and that was very stressful for me for about a year—or a \$260-billion lawsuit. I really had trouble getting my head around that one. But it can intimidate one. It can make you think twice about speaking freely and openly about some of the things that the people you represent are concerned about. Like many here, I represent about 110,000 people.

I'm running out of time, Speaker, but going back to Quebec, the Quebec Minister of Justice at that time introduced a bill that also had the same number: It was Bill 99 again, another Wayne Gretzky bill. I don't have time to read the long title. I do know that there was an election in Quebec. That one fell off the order paper, and maybe someone else could update us on what they have done in the province of Quebec to perhaps provide some guidance for us in our deliberations.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1802.

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Tuesday 24 March 2015

Mardi 24 mars 2015

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Deborah Deller

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

Greffière
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Tuesday 24 March 2015

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Mardi 24 mars 2015

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

INVASIVE SPECIES ACT, 2015 LOI DE 2015 SUR LES ESPÈCES ENVAHISSANTES

Resuming the debate adjourned on December 8, 2014, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 37, An Act respecting Invasive Species / Projet de loi 37, Loi concernant les espèces envahissantes.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate? The member for Timmins–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thanks for your humour and understanding, Speaker; much appreciated.

There are a few things I just want to say at the outset of this debate. First of all, we're going to be supporting this bill. I think it goes a long way to addressing some of the issues that deal with having to control evasive species in the province of Ontario. But as with every bill, the devil is in the details in regard to what this bill actually will end up doing, what it will end up costing and how effective it's going to be. That's what I'd like to spend my time talking about because, as we know, this bill should pass second reading, and I would imagine it will. The government's proposing this bill, so it's a government bill. More than likely this bill will pass second reading. It will go into committee and we'll get a chance, when this gets into committee, to be able to get into some of the issues that I want to raise in this particular debate.

The first thing I just want to say is, I don't think anybody in this House—and I think probably hardly anybody in this province—is going to argue that we don't have a problem when it comes to evasive species. We saw what happened with various evasive species that have introduced themselves into our ecosystem here in Ontario: everything from what was dragged in from the oceans through the Great Lakes in regard to zebra mussels and other species that have migrated here by way of attaching themselves to seafaring ships that end up inside our Great Lakes system to—what ends up happening is just products being shipped by air and by rail from around North America and around the world that end up here in Ontario and eventually end up in our environment.

What that could mean, quite frankly, to the ecosystem in those areas—we all see it driving down the highways, at least where I come from. Purple loosestrife is abundant and pretty plentiful across most ditches across Ontario. It's actually quite a pretty flower, and I know the bees like it, but it is a problem when it comes to other species that it comes into contact with.

I guess the question becomes—and this is really the fundamental question—how effectively can any legislation deal with any of that? I think we shouldn't delude ourselves at the very beginning. There's no way in heck, if this bill was perfect, that you're going to eliminate the threat of evasive species in the province of Ontario. Some of the ways by which evasive species end up coming into this province and are introduced into our ecosystem may be out of our control, to a certain degree.

Now, it's not to say that we shouldn't be doing something, it's not to say we shouldn't support this legislation; obviously, this legislation is a step in the right direction. I think the general point that I'm trying to make is that with all the plans of mice and men, at the end of the day nature will have its way. So let's not pat ourselves on the back and walk away from this exercise to say, "Oh, my God, look at this. The Legislature of Ontario, we have on such-and-such a date passed such-and-such a bill that is going to eliminate evasive species from being introduced in the ecosystem of Ontario." Because the fact is that we will still have evasive species that'll be introducing themselves into our province. No matter how hard we work at it and no matter how good we are it, we're going to always have that problem.

So let's be clear: What this is is an attempt in order to try to deal with those things that we can have an effect on, by way of good public policy and by way of being able to control how these particular species end up in our ecosystem. That's just generally the first comment I want to make.

The second thing I want to say: As I read through this bill—and I encourage members to read this bill because I think it's indicative of what is the problem in this Legislature to a great extent—much of what's going to happen in this bill is going to be covered by regulation. We, as legislators who stand here today who are debating and eventually will pass a bill that will go into law, really have no idea what the bill's going to look like in the end, Mr. Speaker, because the regulations that are to be drafted by cabinet are not subject to this Legislature's approval.

We, for whatever reason, got ourselves down this path of delegating the authority of the Legislature to regulation and to cabinet to do what they want when it comes to

regulation. I think that's unfortunate because I think that regulations should reflect what it is that the legislators wanted at the very beginning. I would hope that we would go back to the day where regulation was done in such—first of all, delegating our authority for cabinet to make decisions about legislation by putting everything into regulation used to be not the norm, it used to be the exception, in this place.

When we were passing legislation in the House, the bills were thicker—no question, they were more voluminous—they took longer to draft because they were much more complicated, but the bill actually dealt with, "In the case of X, this is what the minister shall do; in the case of Y, this is what the minister may do." It was pretty well spelled out in the legislation what the bill was intended to do and how it was going to happen. That's the way that legislation was drafted in this House for over 100 years.

For whatever reasons—and we can all point to each other in this place because we've all been in government in the last 20-some-odd years in this place—we have more and more devolved the power of this Legislature to the corner office of the Premier and to cabinet. I think that's unfortunate because what you end up with is the Legislature pronouncing itself on something, deciding to take a collective decision to do whatever that is, and then cabinet goes off and does what the heck it wants.

I will give you a bill as an example that orchestrates this, and I have raised this before. Back in the day there was a Premier by the name of Bob Rae. Bob Rae decided that he wanted to introduce casinos in the province of Ontario, to the chagrin of some. There were people in this province at the time, as there are now, who believed we should have never brought casinos to the province of Ontario. I'm not one of them; I was actually in favour of casinos being established in Ontario.

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But the point is this: The Conservatives then, who were the third party, took the position that casinos should not be allowed to be established in a community unless there was a referendum where the public in that community has the say. So what ended up happening is that when the NDP was defeated and the Conservatives took office, they introduced a bill in this House, and the bill essentially said that in the future, with any casino to be established in the province of Ontario, there needs to be a referendum. This House debated that bill. This House passed that bill. Quite frankly, it was probably not a bad idea. But all of the details as to what would be in the referendum and whether there was going to be a referendum was left to regulation. This House passed a bill that said, "There shall be a referendum any time a new casino is established in Ontario." The House pronounced itself on that at second and third reading. The bill was passed into law and it was enacted. The difficulty: All of the detail was in the regulation. Then, some years later, when Dalton McGuinty became the Premier of Ontario, he decided by regulation that there would be no referendum at the establishment of any casino in the province of Ontario.

Well, Speaker, that is not what this House decided. What this House decided at the time was, "There shall be

a referendum." It seems to me that what should have happened, if we had not delegated our authority as we did on that particular bill, is that the government would have been forced to come into this House and to bring a bill to say, "We are changing so that there no longer needs to be a referendum," and this House could have pronounced itself on that idea, either yes or no, up and down.

That's the problem when you start delegating authority. If you look at this bill, Speaker, much of the detail—I would say about 90% of the detail as to how this bill is going to work—is going to be left to the minister and is going to be left to the cabinet to decide by regulation. They're going to decide what is an evasive species. It's not going to be some mechanism that we understand now at second reading; it's going to be something that's going to be established in regulation after this bill is passed. How is the evasive species strategy going to deal with trying to deal with the evasive species? All of those questions are left to regulation. It just seems me that this is an issue that all of us have something to say about. The details by which this is to work should at the very least be inside the bill so that we understand clearly what it is we are trying to do by way of strategies to deal with evasive species.

How can the public comment on this bill in committee effectively if they don't have what's in—there's nothing in the bill at this point, second reading, that deals with the specifics of how we are going to identify evasive species and what the strategies are going to be to deal with evasive species. The only thing we know for sure is what the fines will be: up to \$250,000—is it \$250,000 or \$250 million? Is it thousand or million? It has to be thousand.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Thousand.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, \$250,000, and going to jail for a year. We know this because in the bill it's prescribed what the penalties will be. I don't believe you can delegate that to cabinet. I believe that's something that still has to be spelled out in law, because only this Legislature can deal with those issues. But that's about the only thing we're certain about. We're not certain as to the mechanisms by which we will identify and then deal with evasive species.

So when the public and those people interested in dealing with evasive species issues come to the committee, they're going to be able to pronounce themselves generally on the issue, but they're going to have a heck of a hard time trying to hone in on, how is the strategy going to work, what is the government really proposing, does it make sense, should it be adjusted, is it strong enough, is it too strong? You can't pronounce yourself on any of that stuff because we don't know. It's essentially like holding up a bill that has a title and the inside of the bill is blank. We know what the title of the bill is, we know the effect of what the government wants, but we have no idea of what the details are going to be.

Now, I realize that for most government members who sit on the back bench and most cabinet ministers and, I would argue, for a whole bunch of opposition members, we don't think about the danger of delegating authority to

cabinet. It's not the top-of-mind issue that everybody thinks about—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Until they cancelled the \$1.2-billion gas plant.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Until they cancelled the \$1.2-billion gas plant, as the member from Nepean says; exactly. But that was, again, a decision by cabinet.

My point is, if we end up in the situation that we are in now where we draft legislation and everything is left to regulation, it beckons the question, what is this Legislature doing, delegating its authority to cabinet? Legislation should be drafted in such a way that is more prescriptive, that describes what the government wants to do and how they're going to do it. That would be the first comment that I would make.

The other comment I want to make is—you look at the Ministry of Natural Resources. What this bill is going to do—which is a good idea—is they are going to take the myriad of ministries and the myriad of policies that exist out there, the different ministries that deal with evasive species, and put them all under one roof and have one authority to deal with it: one minister. Okay, I think that makes an ample amount of sense. Imagine trying to fight the Second World War and you had 15 generals trying to essentially lead the Battle of Stalingrad or whatever it might be. It wouldn't make any sense. You have to have one person who is in charge, who at the end of the day listens to all of the advice but makes the decision. If we're going to have a battle on evasive species—and I think the war example is a little bit harsh. But my point is, I agree you have to have somebody who is heading up the charge, somebody who ultimately makes the decision about how we're going to do this and what we're going to do and all of that kind of stuff, based on what's in the legislation.

The problem is that the Ministry of Natural Resources is one of those ministries that has been targeted, over the next three years, to lose 6% per year. I repeat: The Ministry of Natural Resources, according to the last budget—the progressive Kathleen Wynne budget that the NDP voted against—has a 6% reduction over the next three years, that they lose each year over the next three years in their budget. How are they going to pay for this?

Here is the question: Who is going to be left at the Ministry of Natural Resources to shut off the lights as they walk out of the room? Who are going to be the inspectors? Who are going to be the field staff who deal with the science necessary to deal with what are the evasive species and what the targets should be and how we deal with the elimination of that evasive species? Who is going to do this work if you don't have people at the ministry who are capable of doing that because they don't have the staff anymore? The MNR, the Ministry of Natural Resources, has shut down the entire scientific division of the MNR; it's gone. That was under the progressive government of the Liberals. Remember those progressives? They talked about, "Oh, my God, we campaigned from the left." But God, did they govern from the right.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: That's an invasive species.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I was coming to that. You're beating me to the line. You're really good, Mr. Natyshak; you're very good. I like the way he thought about where I was going. Really, the endangered species here is the progressive Liberal. That's the endangered species, if we were talking about endangered species. I wanted to use that line. My good friend Mr. Vanthof came up with that this morning.

My point is, there's hardly the capacity within the Ministry of Natural Resources today, and we know that the Ministry of Natural Resources is going to lose 6% funding each and every year for the next three years. Who is going to do this? Who is going to do the work that has to be done to deal with evasive species?

So here's the situation—because we're seeing it in other areas of the Ministry of Natural Resources, and I only use that ministry as an example. There are all kinds of legislative obligations that that ministry has. It administers the Public Lands Act; it administers a number of acts dealing with how we approach fishing and hunting in our province; it deals with the quarries act; it deals with a whole bunch of different legislation that they are legislatively obligated to carry out mandates of, given to them by this Legislature. They can't do it now.

Mr. Speaker, if you went into your local Ministry of Natural Resources office and said, "I want to exercise my right as an Ontarian in order to get a land use permit from the Ministry of Natural Resources," you wouldn't even be allowed to apply. Why? Not because the legislation says that you cannot have a land use permit. Of course, legislation permits land use permits. The Legislature decided some years ago that where there is crown land and somebody has a use for it and it's not being sold, you can enter into an agreement with the Ministry of Natural Resources to have a land use permit to do whatever it is that you're trying to do, provided it's within the context of what makes some sense for us from a policy perspective in the Ministry of Natural Resources. But you can't even get the permit today. Do you know why? There's no money. There's nobody in the ministry capable of dealing with the application for a land use permit.

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In my part of the world, we get a fair amount of these kinds of requests: people trying to get land use permits for everything from trying to set up a place for people to be able to do some collective camping, to people trying to operate a business, let's say a campground or something like that, and they need a certain part of land in order to do whatever. You can't even get the permit anymore. So they go to the ministry to apply for the ministry permit that they're entitled to get, they go online—I don't even know if you can still get it online; I know you could at one point—and nobody is there to process the application. They're told, "We're not taking any applications for land use permits." So how in heck are this ministry and this minister going to deal with evasive species when we don't even have the capacity to process the land use permit within the ministry? They don't have the staff at the MNR to be able to do this.

There's a whole section in the bill—I forget what the section number is—that deals with the minister having the power to name the people who will be responsible for doing the inspections and stuff. My question is, who is that? We're going to give it to conservation officers? I think there's, what, 250 conservation officers in the province of Ontario, who already have a whole bunch of work to do because they've been chopped greatly over the last number of years.

I was talking to somebody who used to work at the MNR, who is now retired, in Timmins. We were talking about how when I was first elected there were 60 MNR staff at the Timmins office and 57 MNR staff at the Gogama office. We're down to 30 staff between both offices. Who is left to do the work?

We're going to give conservation officers the job of enforcing the invasive species act legislation? God, they can't even get gas to get in their trucks sometimes, as was the case when the Tories were in power. You couldn't get gas in your truck to go drive in the bush to make sure that people were fishing and hunting according to the law. So I'm asking, who's going to do this?

Again, it brings me to the other issue that I've raised in this house a number of times: Governments and, I would argue, private members have a habit of introducing legislation in this House without any thought of how we're going to pay for it. In the case of the opposition and private members, we cannot propose a bill that costs money, so we're kind of exonerated from any blame at that point. But every bill that the government brings forward has a financial implication of some type. This bill is one that's going to cost money.

You have, essentially, a \$12-billion deficit currently and a government that doesn't seem to have a plan to deal with balancing the books by 2017-18, as they said they would, and we're going to add costs to the Ministry of Natural Resources, if you were to actually do this bill right. You would have to add costs to the treasury of Ontario to be able to make this bill work.

Again, I'm not arguing against this bill. I'm just raising a philosophical point: When bringing legislation to the floor of the Legislature, you would think that cabinet would look at the Minister of Finance and say, "Hey, Mr. Sousa, do we have the money to do this?" If they didn't have that conversation, I say, shame on them. If that discussion wasn't had at the cabinet table, when it comes to whether you have the money to carry out the mandate of this legislation, then it tells me we're in a lot bigger trouble than we think we are.

You wonder why you have a \$12-billion deficit? Fourteen years of Liberal government doing this kind of stuff without the context of how you're going to pay for it adds up after a point in time.

Listen, they're not responsible for the entire \$12 billion. I recognize the economy had a great part to do with that. Health care services, schools and roads still need to be maintained. Those services have to be given, and those costs are going up. I have sympathy for the government trying to deal with a pretty difficult financial situation. I don't care who you are; you have to deal with that.

But my point that I'm making—okay, fine, you brought this legislation to the table. Nowhere did I hear in the minister's speech and nowhere did I see in any of the literature that came out with this legislation how much this bill is going to cost the treasury of Ontario over the next number of years and what the strategy is to pay for that. I think that would be incumbent.

Imagine, in your own personal finances, if you decide: "Well, I just got a new policy that my wife and I are going to take a trip every year for two weeks to Europe." What a great policy. Murielle and I will be dancing down the aisles thinking about all the great places we get to go for two weeks every year. But imagine if you did that without the context of saying, "Well, honey, it means to say that we have to put so much money away every month. It means we have to cut back on expenses here in order to make sure we have the money to take that holiday. Then maybe we can afford to take that holiday." Who, in their personal finances—unless they are living off their credit card, and that's going to come to an end at one point—doesn't say, "All right, we've made a policy decision in our household: two weeks to Europe every year. You better have figured out how you're going to pay for it before you implement that decision"? That's what most of us do in our families. That's what most people do in small businesses. That's what happens—not always in large businesses. Large business, I would argue, is a lot like government. You want to waste money? The bigger the business, the more money you can waste. This whole fallacy that the private sector does it better—go take a look at large corporations. They're not any different than government. They are like crazy cabinets that we have over here, and of a different stripe. They do bad decisions well.

My point is, any time that the government ever comes with any kind of declaration of how they're going to pay for this—now, again, I want to say as a New Democrat that I support this legislation. I think this legislation is long overdue. I think we have to have a strategy to deal with evasive species. But I'm also a practical New Democrat who says, "Okay, how are we going to pay for this?"

I will remind you of somebody by the name of Tommy Douglas. When Tommy Douglas came to government back in Saskatchewan in the late 1940s, early 1950s, what was the first thing that Tommy Douglas did? Everybody says, "Oh, he did health care." No, no, no, no. New Democrats back then, the CCF in Saskatchewan, did not do—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Why don't you ever talk about Bob Rae?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I've talked about Bob. I already did two seconds ago. You weren't listening.

My point is, when Tommy came to power, everybody says, "Oh, the first he did was health care." No. You know the first thing that Tommy Douglas did with his cabinet? They balanced the books. It took them three mandates to be able to undo the mess the Liberals had left in Saskatchewan; where they had left the Saskatchewan provincial government at that time virtually

bankrupt. Tommy Douglas, for three terms, worked at balancing the books.

What was the second thing Tommy Douglas did?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Electrified.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: He electrified rural Saskatchewan. He had to build up the economy of Saskatchewan to build the dollars needed not only to allow Saskatchewan rural farmers to be able to work more efficiently, but they had to build up the economy to have money to build for health care.

What I'm saying here is that as a New Democrat I understand that you need to be able to figure out how you're going to pay for this stuff before you do it. I'm just saying up front here, my friends in the Liberal Party, very good direction as far as legislation. It's not the way I would have written the bill, but good stuff. But please tell me how you're going to pay for this. I hope that the parliamentary assistant for agriculture comments on this when he is back and gets a chance to respond to it, because I would like to know how they are going to pay for the protection under the evasive species.

The other thing in this particular bill that you've got to take a look at—first of all, we're delegating the authority of the cabinet, so we don't know what this bill is going to look like, other than the title says we're going to deal with evasive species. How they're going to do that, God only knows. Cabinet will figure out the details and we're going to find out by way of a press release some time after the bill is passed. I want to come back to that, because I think it speaks to what we need to do legislatively here to fix that.

Not only have they not decided how they're going to pay for this, or told us how they're going to pay for it, but when you take a look at the legislation, the legislation itself is somewhat ambiguous when it comes to deciding who is going to be responsible for enforcing the policies made by cabinet when it comes to dealing with evasive species. If you look at what the bill says, the bill doesn't describe, "It's going to be the Ministry of Natural Resources and these particular people who are responsible for carrying out what is established under the bill and the regulation." It says the minister will decide that by way of regulation. This may end up becoming some private corporation, because we know that this government, God, they love the private sector. The Liberals, I tell you, are outflanking the Conservatives on the right. Everything is private sector. Privatize hydro, backdoor privatization of wine and beer sales in Ontario, privatization of the building of capital in this province when it comes to—not capital, but infrastructure. How many billions of dollars did we waste on that?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Eight billion.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Eight billion dollars. Everything that's private is wonderful. This legislation allows for privatization by the back door of the people who are going to be dealing with whatever is done by way of regulation.

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If you go and look at the bill, it essentially says that the minister will decide who it is who's going to go out

there and actually do the enforcement of whatever laws have to be enforced. That might be a conservation officer, maybe, or it might be—and I think more likely—somebody in the private sector who is going to be contracted to do this. They might go and decide to get a deal with a not-for-profit to do this. Maybe they're going to go to the conservation authorities and have them do it—or maybe they're just going to download it onto the municipalities like they've done with everything else around here. That's why they don't have to talk about cost: Because it's plausible that the municipalities and the LSBs are going to be responsible for enforcing what's under this bill.

The government, in this bill, is essentially being pretty vague not only about how they're going to pay for this—they're pretty vague about what they're going to do and how they're going to do it—but they're also being pretty vague about who's going to carry out the mandate of this bill. This could take the form of privatization and it could take the form of downloading on municipalities. That's just from my reading this bill a couple of times, what I've been able to come up with as I read through the bill.

It came back to the point of, why do we draft bills in this way? Because it's to the advantage of the government. The government can go off and do what it wants to do.

Speaker, I would argue that what's needed in this Legislature are probably two things in order to deal with these types of bills, where everything is left to regulation. I think the first thing is that we should stop delegating the authority of this House to the cabinet. Yes, there are times when we need to do that. I understand that. I've been around here long enough to know that cabinet does need to deal with some of these things, because the ministry has got to go off and work out some of the details. But at the very most, that should be the exception to the rule, not the rule. So we should, first of all, very much diminish our reliance on putting everything in regulation.

The second thing I think we need to do is to make some changes at our committee level when it comes to dealing with regulation. Currently, we are very limited as members. Even the government is limited, with their members, in being able to call any regulation before the committee for review.

For example, there should be a mechanism that says: If the government is going to draft regulations for this bill, once the regulations are done, they should come back as a package to a committee of this Legislature where, at least, the committee has to approve or turn down the regulation. At least this way, the committee would be able to say, "You know what? No, we don't want to approve this and we're kicking this back to the House. Let the government deal with coming back and bringing a better product than the regulations they've put forward." In that way, at least the will of the House is maintained—the idea of Parliament being the place by which we not only decide on the authority to spend money, but how money is spent, is dealt with in the Legislature.

I don't argue that any member of this House, including a cabinet minister, should ever micromanage a ministry. I know my good friend Madeleine Meilleur—I've known her for a lot of years—is not a micromanager. I don't believe micromanaging how our civil servants do their jobs is what we have to do in this Legislature. But I do believe that we have to set the general policy direction. The problem now is that once the cabinet has decided what's going to go into the regulation—we need to have a mechanism so that the regulation comes back to us in some form so we're able to see what the government has done.

Oh, yes, the government will get up and say, "Oh, but Gilles, it's not a problem. You'll be able to get all the regulations on the Ontario Gazette the Monday after they are filed." Yes, I get to see them, I get to read them, but do any members of this House have any say on what is in those regulations? Should the regulations stand as done under what's printed in the Gazette?

For those people who don't know what I'm talking about, every week the Ontario government puts out what they call the Ontario Gazette. There is a requirement for cabinet: that any time they pass a regulation, the regulation be posted in that Gazette so that everybody can see what's happened. I encourage all members to read the Gazette on Mondays, especially under their ministry portfolios, in order to keep an eye on what's going on with regulation.

My point is, there has to be a mechanism, I think, at the very least, so that where we decide in legislation to delegate the authority in some bills—and maybe we don't have to do it with all bills—once the regulations are written, the regulations come back to a committee so that the committee can decide what the next step is. Do we need to do more public consultation? In other words, these would be draft regulations that would be sent to the committee.

The draft regulations that would be created by cabinet would come to the committee. The committee would say, "Okay, you know what? We need a couple of weeks of hearings here," or "We need a couple of days of hearings"—so that the stakeholders who came and spoke to us have a chance to look at this and give us their opinion—and actually fix the regulation so that it does what it is supposed to do.

I'll give you an example of why that is so important.

When Mike Harris was elected Premier, back in 1995, they decided that they wanted to change the assessment system in the province of Ontario.

Ontario had, up until about 1993, a system of assessment that had been around for a long, long time. It was pretty simple. The value of a building in 1957 had been established. They took the value of the building—I think it was 1957—and they would essentially value what that building in 1957 was worth today. So the assessment was a frozen assessment, in 1957. A whole bunch of people pointed out, correctly, the problem is that the house may have been renovated since 1957, and you need to have a mechanism to be able to properly show

the value of the house as of today, when dealing with the assessment.

The government of Ontario, then under Bob Rae, passed legislation in this House that went to market value assessment. The assessment was based on what the house was worth when the house was being valued at whatever date the evaluation happened, every two years.

The government of Mike Harris was opposed to that and voted against it when we were in government and they were the third party, and rightfully so. When they became the government, they decided—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: What's that? I didn't read that. Sorry, I don't have my glasses on.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I thought it was 1957—he pointed out that in some communities, it might have been an evaluation in 1970. But I know that for us in Timmins, it was 1957. Why do I remember that? Because I was born in 1957. That's why that number—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Me too.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You too?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's why that number always stuck in my head. Hey, we're like brothers, you and I, born in 1957.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, that's a few things about you and I.

I digress for a second. A wonderful thing happened some years ago: They decided to do a 1957 birthday party when I turned 50, which was kind of fun. It wasn't for me; it was for everybody who was born in 1957 who was turning 50. It was a great party, but that's a whole other story. It's the only time I've ever seen that done. I just digressed. It was in Schumacher, at the hall—anyway, it will come to me in a minute. Anyway, I digress.

My point is, the Conservatives took office, and they decided to not go to market value. They decided to go to actual value. So they took market value, they morphed it into actual value, and they drafted a bill to move to this model that they preferred. Fair enough. They were a majority government; they had the right to do that.

The problem is, I remember sitting on that committee and reading the bill and seeing that they were delegating authority to regulation. I was noticing that, the way they were drafting the bill, there were actually going to be problems. I was lucky enough to sit on the original committee, back in 1992-93, that dealt with this the first time, so I had a gross understanding of the issue. I was by no means an expert on it—I still am not—but I pointed out to the committee members of the day, "Listen, there's a problem with the way this bill is drafted, because you're leaving all of this to regulation, and some of this doesn't actually jive."

It took five bills, after the actual value assessment bill was passed at third reading—four other bills were introduced into this House and had to be passed in order to fix the problems with the initial bill that had been put in place by the Tories in 1996.

I say that just as a warning of what happens when we don't do our jobs effectively by way of drafting bills. If the bill had been drafted the way that bills normally are drafted—which is that the details are in the bill, not in the regulation—those who came before the committee would have been able to see what the problems were and point out, “Well, no, this doesn't work, for this practical reason.” The government—rightfully so—could have amended their bill in order to be able to deal with it. But they didn't.

That's why I'm saying that if you're not going to stop the delegation of authority to cabinet, you at least have to have a mechanism where draft regulations come back to a committee, and that committee is allowed to look at and decide what the next step should be.

The other thing I just want to touch on—I'm just taking a look at my notes here. There was another point I wanted to make. Oh yes, that was the one. I knew there were four points and I'd hit three of them, and I was spinning around there, trying to remember what the fourth one was. Now I finally remembered.

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One of the things under section 27 that this bill does which is problematic is that the bill essentially says—and I'm just going to read here. Section 27 says that if an area has been designated an evasive species control area or declared an invasive place, and efforts to address the significant threat have so far failed, the minister can use whatever means necessary to remove the eradicated species, whether or not resulting in damage to property or something is moved or destroyed. That means to say we're giving the minister pretty strong powers. You, Mr. Speaker, own two acres of land somewhere in your community. There's an evasive species somewhere around the area. The government has a strategy that doesn't effectively deal with the evasive species, and they decide—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Invasive.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, evasive species.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Invasive.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Invasive. Yes, “e,” “in,” I get those things wrong. It's the French in me. You English-speaking—

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm just trying to help.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, I know. We were both born in the same year.

My point is, there's still a problem with the—invasive?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Invasive.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —invasive species. Thank you for pointing that out.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Evasive is those guys over there.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's the Liberals, evasive.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's the issue: The evasive species is over there.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Got it, okay. Evasive over there; invasive. Okay, gotcha. I really appreciate you doing that for me. That clarifies a couple of things.

Anyway, I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, you have two acres of land. They're trying to deal with this inva-

sive species. The government is not successful in doing so through whatever mechanism they've established to deal with it. The minister gives them the right to say, “I'm going to go on your land and I'm going to burn down the crop,” or, “I'm going to turn over the ground,” or, “I'm going to spray it with something.” They can do whatever, and all they've got to do is give you five days' notice and they're on your ground. Holy jeez, that touches property rights pretty seriously.

Now, I'm not one of these people who believe in—what do they call themselves? The Lanark Landowners Association?

Mr. John Yakabuski: The Ontario Landowners Association.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Yes, the Landowners Association believes everything is a protection-of-property right. Listen, there is a collective part of this province and we do need to work together, and there are good reasons why we have public policy. But to give the crown the ability to go on your land and decide on their own what they're going to do, then talk about compensation after they've done it, seems to me a little bit draconian. Who knows? I would hope that no future minister would ever do something crazy like go on your land and do something that is wholly against what you would allow to happen on your land, and do it without your permission, but this bill allows that. Some will argue, “Well, you have to stop the spread of the disease, the invasive species.” I get it. But I'm sure people will come to this committee who are going to speak to that particular issue.

I understand why the minister is doing it; I get it. But again, this comes down to my point: All of the details of this are left to regulation. What is cabinet going to do when it comes to the regulation around section 27?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Who knows? That's the evasive part of it.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: The evasive people over there, right? I think that's a good point. I'm having a really good debate with you, by the way. I love Yak.

Anyway, my point is that section 27 is going to give the minister pretty extraordinary powers. Do we really want to have a situation where we delegate the details of what's going to be in section 27 to cabinet? No. The last time we looked at some of cabinet's decisions—they're currently under four OPP investigations; they were found to be in a *prima facie* case of contempt when it came to the gas plants. You just take a look at the litany of things this cabinet has done and it doesn't leave you the warm and glowing feeling in your heart that these people are going to do the right thing.

I would argue—and you know what? I would argue for whoever is on that side of the House; I don't care if it's these evasive Liberals or it's New Democrats or it's Tories who are there. I think you have to have a system by which you don't delegate that kind of authority to cabinet. At the very least, you don't have a way of being able to bring that back to the committee so that the committee can decide what those regulations are going to be. It just seems to me—I understand why they're doing this;

there's an argument to be made. I'm not saying that there isn't a reason why this is in the bill. I get it. But we need to spell out, I would argue—

Mr. John Yakabuski: We need some clarification.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Exactly. We need to spell out section 27 a little bit more clearly so we don't end up in a situation where you've got somebody coming on somebody's land and doing things contrary to the property owner's permission or benefit.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Then the government would be the invasive species.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: They'd be evasive, because then the government decides what the compensation is going to be. You come to my land, you do something on my property and then tell me how much I should be compensated? I don't have a lot of confidence.

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I heard the people across the way saying municipalities do it. Just because somebody's doing something wrong doesn't mean you should repeat it. That would be my only argument. I just say that.

Again, I think the general gist of what the government is trying to do in this bill is not a bad one. I think the government is actually trying to do something effective here. I don't think anybody in this House disagrees with what the government is trying to do.

I think, however, it really does come down to those key issues that I've raised: Why are we delegating our authority to cabinet? Why aren't we hearing how they're going to pay for this, in the sense of what it's going to cost? And who in the end is actually going to carry out these particular responsibilities that we describe in the bill? We certainly know the Ministry of Natural Resources, as they are now, lack the capacity to even do what they've got under their current mandate, without throwing another one at them. Nobody in this House, as far as the minister, the PA or any other member of the government, has told us how much they figure this bill is going to cost.

I would think, in a day—especially as this government is on an austerity kick these days and trying to say that they're going to balance this budget somehow or other. I'm not sure how they're going to do that, but that's a whole other thing. You would think that the government would at least come forward and say, "Okay, we estimate it's going to cost us X. This is how we expect to be able to pay for it. This is what we think we can do, given the current fiscal room that we have or the fiscal realities of what the province of Ontario has to offer." I think most of us here would then be able to say, "Okay, we get it. You're trying to bite off a problem this big, but you can only afford to bite off this much of the problem, and that's because of resources and how much money you've got. We understand that." We can at least look each other in the eye and be truthful to each other about what we're actually going to be able to accomplish with this particular bill.

I just want to also bring a couple of local points on this particular bill, just to say that in northern Ontario we are

seeing—I'm seeing in my riding, as I'm sure you guys are in yours—that there is an issue with evasive species. We don't have many of the problems that you have down in the Great Lakes, but we're seeing the migration of evasive species from southern Ontario—invasive species—starting to move their way north further and further. We're seeing the slow creep as they start moving their way northwards.

For example, one of the things that we've seen is people who ferry boats to go fishing or to go boating from one lake to another don't do a very good job cleaning off the bottom of their boats. They take the boat from lake A and they move it 100 miles or 200 miles north, south, east or west and they drop it into another lake somewhere else. As a result, they're moving a species or they're moving something that may be natural in the other lake but is not sustainable in the lake that they're going to. So things like that have to be dealt with as well.

It's a hard one to deal with, because what do you do? Most of the lakes I come from, when we go fishing—there's no pump there, there's no pressurized water system to be able to wash off the bottom of your boat as you pull it off the Mattagami River or you pull it off Rufus Lake or wherever it is that you might be going. It really is incumbent upon the person who owns the boat to say, "Okay, I know that I've pulled this thing off Rufus and I'm going to be going to Lake X in a couple of weeks, so I'll bring the boat home and I'll wash it off." I think there needs to be a bit more education done as far as campaigns on the television, on radio, whatever, to let people know that you do have a responsibility as a boat owner to make sure that, in fact, you do clean off the hull of your boat when you're moving it from one lake to the other.

Listen, we're all guilty. I've got probably around three or four boats and I'm one of those people who moves it from Kamiskotia Lake to Round Lake to Winter Lake, and I probably very seldom have done that. As I look at this bill, it reminds me that I have a responsibility, as other people have a responsibility, to make sure that we, in fact, don't contaminate other lakes as we move from one lake to the other in the area.

0950

Now, I would argue, moving from Kamiskotia to Round Lake is probably not a big deal, because it's pretty well the same—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Same watershed.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: —the same part of the watershed, the same part of the ecosystem. But I think if I were to pull the boat off of Kamiskotia Lake and move it to down to God knows where, who knows what I'm bringing with me.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Where is God-Knows-Where Lake, anyway?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: God-Knows-Where Lake is in Wandering township. That's in Wandering township. There are many fishing holes that I have that are called No-Name Lake in Wandering township. That way there, if you can try to find it, you're doing quite well.

Mr. John Yakabuski: That would be a good place to trap those invasive species.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's right—evasive species, in that case.

I just want to say, on the local level, we do have a responsibility to be able to do the right thing.

Again, I just want to echo some of what the Environmental Commissioner was saying. I noticed a release by him the other day, where he's, what, at the end of his third term now?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, it would be his third term.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: He has announced that he's not going to be seeking reappointment, which I think is kind of sad, because I believe that he has done quite a good job as the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario.

Gord and I go back a long way. For some of you who don't know, Gord was the candidate who ran against me in 1995 up in Timmins—James Bay, at the time Cochrane South. I've got great respect for Gord. I can call him Gord, because he is a friend, and I think it's a mutual respect.

I just want to take the chance, as we're talking on something that he has been pretty passionate about, to say that he has done a good job as our Environmental Commissioner. I was one who was sad to see that he wasn't again going to be standing for office.

Now, I heard—and I don't know if this is true or if this is just rumour—there was pressure coming from the government to him that they didn't want him. They didn't want to keep him. That's one of the things that I was hearing. I don't know if it's true. It may just be rumour.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's probably time to move on.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: But, at the end of the day, it was unfortunate that that's the case, because I do believe he did a good job.

Some people will say it's time to move on, that somebody else after three terms should take it on. I don't know about that. We've had a number of officers of the House who have stayed here a fairly long period of time who have actually done quite a good job, because they understand and know their portfolio in depth. They've done a good job and they've proven themselves. The best system that we have is a system that we have established in this Legislature where each officer of the House has to reapply after their four- or five-year term. You don't get an automatic reappointment once you're appointed the first time or the second time or the third time. You have to reapply.

I think that officers of the House should understand that when this Legislature puts that policy in place, it's one that says even though you've done a great job, and even though you have been doing the job for some time, you need to be able to, because it is an appointment—it's not a job that you've been given; it's an appointment. Just as we stand for office and have to get re-elected every four to five years, officers of the House are similar and have to be reappointed by this Legislature.

My argument would be that if somebody has done a really good job, such as our Ombudsman, such as the Environmental Commissioner, I think chances are they would get reappointed, because who else can do the job better than them?

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: There might be some who feel different, but I'm just making the point that, in fact, if they have done a good job, they probably have a pretty good chance of being reappointed.

So I just want to say that the Environmental Commissioner has raised a number of concerns in regard to the government's direction on this particular bill. Unfortunately, I think some of the issues that he has raised have fallen on deaf ears, but the government has seen fit to bring back a similar bill to what they had introduced in this House in the minority Parliament. This is a bill that I believe will get passed in this House, and I believe it is going to be a bill that will have the support of all three parties.

Je veux finir sur le point, monsieur le Président, de rappeler qu'un des gros problèmes avec ce projet de loi fait affaire avec la question de la capacité dans l'intérieur du ministère des Richesses naturelles, qui n'est pas là, de faire ce qu'ils sont demandés à faire présentement avec les différentes législations pour lesquelles ils sont responsables. Quand on a le gouvernement qui introduit encore une autre responsabilité au ministère, il faut se demander comment ils vont être capables de rencontrer les demandes mises sur eux par cette législation qui est légiférée ici dans l'Assemblée législative.

Je pense que ça va être intéressant que le gouvernement pourra indiquer exactement ce qu'il veut faire quand ça vient aux détails du projet de loi. Tout est laissé à la réglementation. Deuxièmement, je pense que le gouvernement a besoin de démontrer combien ça va coûter pour être capable de mettre en place cette législation, mais aussi qui va être responsable de livrer les services dans ce projet de loi, parce que quand tu lis le projet de loi, c'est pas mal clair qu'on donne au ministre l'autorité de nommer n'importe qui pour être responsable de faire respecter la loi qui sera établie une fois qu'elle a passé à travers cette Assemblée. Ça peut être quelqu'un du ministère des Richesses naturelles, ça peut être quelqu'un dans les municipalités, ça peut être quelqu'un dans le secteur privé, ça peut être quelqu'un dans le secteur à but non lucratif. On va voir avec le temps, mais ce n'est pas décrit dans la loi autrement que le ministre va avoir le droit d'établir qui va «*enforcer*» ce projet de loi.

Donc, je veux dire au gouvernement qu'ils ont besoin de clarifier certains points avec ce projet de loi.

The bill is going to go to committee. I don't think there need to be extensive hearings on this bill; I think we need to have some. I'm trying to remember, and maybe the whip from the Conservative Party will remind me. I don't remember if we did public hearings on this bill. Did this even get past second reading last time? I don't think it did. I don't think it got to second reading.

Mr. John Yakubuski: Oh, it got to second reading.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: No, but I don't know if we actually got hearings.

Mr. John Yakubuski: I don't think it got hearings.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I don't think we got the hearings.

Anyway, my point is: I don't think it's a bill where you're going to have to do months and months of hearings, but I think there needs to be some adequate time given to public hearings, which brings me, I think, to my last point, which is the way that we pass legislation through this House.

It used to be—and I think it was a good way of doing it—that a government would decide, if it wanted to pass a bill in the fall session, to bring the bill in and have the debate at second reading, and the government would indicate: "At the end of the fall session we'd like to have second reading so that we can put the bill into committee in the intersession." The committee then took a week, two weeks, three weeks—whatever it needed—in the intersession to go out and to travel Ontario in order to meet with people on the subject matter at hand in the bill.

What that allowed was sufficient time for second reading debate. Sometimes it wasn't a lot. Sometimes it was just part of the dealing that goes on with House leaders where you'd have a bill like this and you'd say, "We all agree so we'll each do our leads. I've got two speakers; he has three." You would do that. The bill would then go off to committee.

But the important part is the committee was given the authority to travel in the intersession and to be able to travel to those people interested and able to give comment on the bill. And so the bill would go in the intersession. It would do one, two, three weeks. It would travel around the province. You would hear from the experts. You'd hear from the citizens on the bill. And then you actually took some time in clause-by-clause to thoughtfully go through what you had heard in order to be able to deal with it as far as how you amend the bill—so that when we went to clause-by-clause the government of the day would sit there, along with the opposition parties, and you would try to actually deal with the amendments in a way that made sense for the bill.

If the government is smart, I would argue, it looks at all amendments, no matter what side of the House they come from, and says, "Is this an amendment that helps or is this a political amendment?" And I understand if the government says it's a political amendment and this is an amendment that's fraught with politics of the opposition.

Mr. John Yakubuski: They can't be against them just because it came from someone else. That's what happens too often.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: That's my point. That's where I'm going with this. If the government sees the amendment as a political amendment, I'll understand why they'll do what they'll do. But a lot of times—and, I would argue, a majority of times—there are amendments that are put forward by members because they actually listen to the public and they say, "You know what? I think that person is right, so I asked my legislative people to draft up an

amendment in order to fix that part of the bill that is flawed." You need some adequate time in clause-by-clause—not time-allocated—so that you can actually deal with amending the bill in such a way that clarifies the bill doing what needs to be done.

I would argue that in this particular bill we'd be able to actually deal with some of the regulatory issues ahead of time by saying what the intent of the regulation should be, at the very least, and not just leaving it blank for the minister to be able to do.

For example, under section 27, I wouldn't mind an amendment that says that some official within the MNR is going to be responsible for policing this bill and making sure there is enforcement. I don't want to see it privatized. I don't want to see it downloaded. But then what would happen is that the bill would come back in the next session—in that case, the spring session—it would have a little bit of time at third reading and it would be passed.

I would hope what the government is going to do here with the bill, when it's done second reading this spring, is that we actually allow the bill to travel in committee in the summer. It may not need long. As the critic, at this point I'm not being overwhelmed by a whole bunch of people writing in, saying, "You know, I would really like to present to this bill," but I'm sure we're going to get some. But we have some sufficient amount of time given to being able to hear what the public has to say on this bill—and that we have sufficient time at clause-by-clause to be able to deal with whatever amendments need to be done in order to make the bill stronger. In the end, if we do our jobs here as legislators and if we do our jobs in committee well, this bill actually can be written in such a way and amended in such a way that it actually does what the bill is saying to do in the first place; that is, to find an effective strategy to deal with evasive species.

1000

I'll just say, Mr. Speaker, the bill is a step in the right direction. Our caucus is going to vote for this particular bill. I think I've laid out fairly succinctly, as best as I could in the hour that I had, what I see are the major problems with the bill. I look forward to the public coming to us and letting us know what we can do by way of amendment to this bill that would actually let it do what it has to do.

I just want to thank members for taking the time and listening to what I have to say, and I'm looking forward to their comments.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Questions and comments?

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Merci, monsieur le Président. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the member for Timmins—James Bay for his thoughtful articulations on this important piece of legislation.

Just by way of response, I'll say a couple of things. The member opposite talked about the fact that there is no invasive species listed in the bill. In fact, our government is going to put forward regulations to list those invasive species. In cases where a threat requires im-

mediate action, the minister would have the authority to temporarily designate a significant-threat invasive species. But in terms of broader consultation, this is going to occur via the EBR, the environmental and regulatory registries, before any species would be listed—this further to already significant consultation that has taken place.

That consultation, which has already taken place, coupled with the EBR responses—which I know will be significant, and that the member opposite will encourage his constituencies to participate in—will serve to guide us. Both those things will be strengthened by the scientists—numerous, I'm happy to say, in the ministry—extremely knowledgeable, that will serve to guide this legislation as it moves forward. I look forward to the constructive debate in the House on this important bill, given its importance to our economy, our social fabric and our day-to-day lives.

In my own riding of Burlington, we have the Cootes to Escarpment right next door, which has the largest number of endangered species anywhere in the country. That, of course, is right next door to the Hamilton harbour, which is in the midst of a very significant cleanup. We have the greenbelt just next door. I'm surrounded by provincial parks and significant green space. Tackling invasive species is going to be a very important issue for all of us to be thinking about and looking at.

Again, I thank the member opposite for his constructive comments. I look forward to discussing this further in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further comments and questions?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I listened intently to my colleague from Timmins-James Bay on his hour-long address. That's a long time to be talking about something in this House, but he does it as well as anybody. He does like to talk, which I am not opposed to myself. But—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: You're not exactly shy on that point.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I do want to say that I agree with the member from Burlington that this is a very important piece of legislation. I wish the government had moved more quickly on this because this is a serious threat to, as she said, our environment and our economy. When your economy is threatened, you have to move quickly.

The world has shrunk. Trade has changed a lot of things. Most of it is very, very positive, but one of the things that has happened is that our world has shrunk, and species from other parts of the globe that have no natural predators here can be transferred to our environment, and they run amok because we don't have the natural predators that keep those populations in check. It's happening all across the globe. It's not just happening here; it's happening all across the globe. So some kind of legislation that gives us some teeth to deal with these invasive species is very, very necessary.

We do need to have the debate to make sure that we're covering the bases and that we're doing it right, and we get it right the first time. That is why this bill needs to get

through to committee, so that we can get the input from those stakeholders and those people that understand the implications and ramifications of this, or any other piece of legislation, better than we do ourselves, because they're on the ground every day. We may write the legislation and we may pass it here, but I think it's very important that we get the input from those stakeholders that understand it, quite frankly, better than we ever would.

We need to get this bill to committee. As my colleague from Timmins-James Bay said, the government has to have an open mind when we get to committee, and if there are constructive elements that can be addressed through amendment, don't be against them just because they're coming from the other side.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member.

Further questions and comments?

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to comment on the one-hour lead that our House leader, Monsieur Bisson, gave on this bill. He brings a lot of institutional knowledge to this place and certainly has dealt within the realm of environmental protection throughout the years, so I would advise members of the government, particularly new members, to really heed some of his counsel and particularly some of his warnings.

The effectiveness of this bill is not guaranteed, there is no question. Whether it's a 100% locked-tight, well-nuanced bill, it will not eliminate invasive species as an entirety. We have to recognize that.

We also have to recognize that the provisions of constructing this bill through regulation really don't allow members of this Legislature to provide oversight. So as Monsieur Bisson suggested, when those regulations are finally drafted, they should come back to committee for us as members to be able to comment on them. It's something that should be a regular course of action in here, but unfortunately, it has not been so for quite some time through the measures that the government has enacted or used to push bills through this House.

He talked about section 27. I wasn't aware of that. That is quite frightening. It gives the minister extraordinary powers, should they designate a certain area with a threat of invasive species, to take any action: burn a plot of land, use chemicals that we may not even know of. This is far-reaching—overreaching, I would say—and something that we should take a very close look at, something that could potentially end up being a slippery slope and set a precedent for other areas or other jurisdictions.

Then something that he mentioned which I think is quite reasonable, something that I think Ontarians would appreciate, is that we travel this bill, that we would do wide consultation, broad consultation. It's something that affects the entire Great Lakes basin, as we see a continued presence of invasive species. They have lots of voice, they have concerns, and we should certainly give them the opportunity to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Essex.

Further questions and comments?

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'm pleased to speak and respond to some of the comments that have been made on this important piece of legislation. When I think about my community and how this touches Etobicoke Centre, I think about something called the lamprey eel which, back in the 1960s, we began to address as an invasive species. It really devastated a number of the fish that populate the Great Lakes, trout as an example. Key tributaries are where they were most prominent. We've been able to control that, and the impact of that not only for our wildlife but for our economy has been a positive one.

So when I think about this piece of legislation, I think about things like that. I think about the fact that this is a bill that will ensure that we do a much better job of assessing and preventing these types of species from ravaging our economy and ravaging our green spaces.

If this legislation is passed, Ontario will actually be the only jurisdiction in Canada that has stand-alone invasive species legislation. I mentioned the lamprey eel, but there are others that we need to be concerned about, like zebra mussels and the emerald ash borer. This costs our economy tens of millions of dollars each year. When we think about the Asian carp, they have the potential to do long-lasting damage to our environmental systems, impacting our \$2.2-billion recreational fishing industry in Ontario.

This is really a critical bill. I think it takes important steps to make sure that we address some of these invasive species. We know what the impact of invasive species can be on our communities, on our green spaces and on our economy. I would urge members from all sides of the House to come together and let's pass this bill so that we can enact it, move forward with it and reap the positive benefits as soon as possible.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Etobicoke Centre.

Back to the member from Timmins–James Bay for final comments.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I want to thank all members for their comments. I just want to speak to the original comment by the member from—

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: Burlington.

Mr. Gilles Bisson:—Burlington. She talks about how the ability to comment will be by the EBR. The EBR and a legislative committee are two different things. The EBR is an opportunity for people to comment on the drafting of regulations, and then cabinet can decide whether to take those comments into consideration when doing the regulations. It's quite a different thing than an actual legislative committee that has the ability to have public hearings and actually put forward amendments that the government has to deal with, either by voting for or voting against.

I don't want to have to rely on the EBR as a way to deal with regulations. The point that I was trying to make in my speech was that there's a real problem here when we leave all of the details to regulation. It makes us vote on a bill that has a title and we really don't know what it's going to do in the end, as far as its effectiveness and

how it's going to be done and how it's going to be paid for.

That's why I argued that we should either put the details of that in the bill or, at the very least, we have to have a mechanism that, once the regulations are drafted by cabinet, those regulations have the ability to be called by a committee—to take a look at the package and, if necessary, re-engage the public in some way; that we're able to then, as a committee, vote on any amendments that are necessary when it comes to the draft regulations as presented. It just seems to me that in that way it's a much more transparent system and we actually end up in a way in which we engage the public, where they could have an opportunity to have a real say when it comes to the outcome of the legislation.

It's unfortunate that we find ourselves in this situation, because over the last 20-odd years, we have moved more and more towards the delegation of the authority of this House to cabinet. I just think it's a bad thing, considering the evasive species that lives on the other side of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): That ends the debate for this morning. I'd like to thank all members for their contributions.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): This House stands recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1012 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Jim Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate page Aiden Campbell for being a page captain today and welcome his mother, LeAnne Campbell, who is with us in the public gallery.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Welcome. Further introductions?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's my pleasure to welcome back to the Legislature Bud Wildman, Ross McClellan and Richard Johnston, former inhabitants of this place.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: It is with great pleasure that I welcome Rachel Mathews from my riding of Mississauga–Erindale. She is seated in the members' east gallery. Rachel is the mother of Sarah John, who is a page captain today. Welcome to Queen's Park, Rachel, and congratulations to Sarah.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Speaker, I would like you to join me in welcoming Chris Hamilton, Mark Broadhurst, Leslie Brams-Baker and Michelle Lefler to Queen's Park today. They all represent Mars Canada.

Mr. John Vanthof: I'd like to introduce Frances Cockburn. She's the mother of one of our page captains, Jessie Meanwell. She's joining us in the public gallery this morning.

Mr. Han Dong: It's my pleasure to welcome the family of today's page captain Caleb Woolcott: mother, Lynne Woolcott; father, Kevin Barrett; and grandfather Peter Woolcott. Welcome.

Mr. Ted Arnott: I want to welcome grade 10 students from Christ the King secondary school in Georgetown who are with us here today as well.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm happy to welcome some family members who are here today in the members' west gallery. From Amherstburg and LaSalle I have Monsieur Alfred Roy; son épouse, Lorraine Roy; and my nephew Carson Reaume, who is starring as Jethro in the Mirvish production of the Heart of Robin Hood. I encourage everyone to go and check it out; I know a minister has.

Mr. Monte Kwinter: There's a group that's already in the building but they're not in the gallery yet. I would like to welcome Stephen Adler, the associate director from the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs; and the Diller Teen group from Israel. The Diller Teen Fellows Program is a UJA Federation of Greater Toronto premier leadership development program for Jewish teens in grades 10 and 11.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I have the great pleasure of introducing—they're going to be in the members' east gallery—representatives from a great Canadian company called Mars Inc.: Chris Hamilton, Mark Broadhurst, Leslie Brams-Baker and Michelle Lefler. I want to invite all members to a reception they're holding this evening in the legislative dining room between 5 and 7:30 p.m.—a great Canadian and Ontario company.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a great pleasure to welcome Felix Wagenfeld, a senior expert with the German Academic Exchange Service. Felix studied abroad here in Toronto 10 years ago. Please join me in welcoming Felix.

Mr. Arthur Potts: It's my pleasure to introduce Joseph Tilley from New Westminster, BC. He's in Ontario doing research for a book on Agnes Macphail. Today is Agnes Macphail Day, proclaimed in 1993. I'm delighted to have him here.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I have a little bit of housekeeping. In the members' west gallery, we have Ross McLean from Bellwoods in the 30th, 31st, 32nd and 33rd Parliaments; Richard Johnston, from Scarborough West, in the 31st, 32nd, 33rd and 34th Parliaments; and Bud Wildman, from Algoma, in the 30th to 36th Parliaments. Welcome and thank you for being here, gentlemen.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Sorry, Ross McClellan. I wasn't here yet.

Also, a small piece of housekeeping: One of our members has had a significant birthday. I would like to congratulate the member from York Centre, Monte, celebrating on Sunday his 84th birthday.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As he has reminded me from time to time, every day that he is here he sets another record.

Also, we have with us today—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have with us today—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I'll try for a third time.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All right, let's get it all out now.

We have with us today, in the Speaker's gallery, Mr. Roberto Ubilla, the newly appointed consul general of the Republic of Chile at Toronto. Welcome and thank you for being here.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finally, I would ask our pages to assemble to be introduced. They are our new, freshly minted pages. We have with us Demily Bello Thibodeau from Algoma-Manitoulin; Alycia Berg from Cambridge; Aiden Campbell from Simcoe-Grey; Max Ciuffetelli-Parker from Etobicoke-Lakeshore; Thomas Dubois from Brant; Joe Fast from Ottawa South; Alysa Haji from Thornhill; Ian Harvey from Etobicoke Centre; Sarah John from Mississauga-Erindale; Cameron Johnson from Perth-Wellington; Japneet Kaur from Brampton-Springdale; Jessie Meanwell from Hamilton Centre; Ranen Oomen-Danckert from Dufferin-Caledon; Rahul Pandya from Huron-Bruce; Marin Papulkas from Oakville; Emma Patterson from Parkdale-High Park; Natasha Pelletier from St. Paul's; Kari Peltonen from Thunder Bay-Superior North; Danielle Peters from Don Valley East; Jade Proulx from Ottawa West-Nepean; Connor Tomashevski from Wellington-Halton Hills; Cynthia Wan from Welland; and Caleb Woolcott from Trinity-Spadina. These are our pages.

Applause.

ORAL QUESTIONS

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Jim Wilson: My question is for the Premier. Premier, as you know, as of last week General Motors confirmed that the Camaro will no longer be built in Oshawa. Ontario lost out to Lansing, Michigan just across the border. In response, all we've heard from your Minister of Economic Development are talking points about optimism. Premier, optimism alone doesn't secure jobs.

Can you tell us what your plan is to keep GM in Oshawa?

1040

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know the Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure is going to want to speak to this, but I would say, first of all, we're not going to apologize for being optimistic about the economy in Ontario. We are optimistic. We know the fact that our government has invested over \$850 million in the auto sector has leveraged \$11 billion in private sector investment. That's a very, very good

thing. Since the summer, Ontario has seen nearly \$4 billion in new auto investments.

What's happening is that the decisions we made in terms of the auto sector—decisions that the party opposite did not support—have actually borne fruit. The auto sector is recovering and we are very much a part of that recovery.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Premier: I'm a little baffled by that response. Maybe you haven't got it straight. Some 3,700 jobs hang in the balance.

Your economy is doing so well that you lost the Camaro. You didn't win a new contract with GM; it went right across the border to Lansing, Michigan. So I wouldn't be bragging about the economy, and I wouldn't be babbling on about the past either. Some 3,700 people—workers at GM—are looking for an answer about their futures and their future job prospects.

I'll give you an opportunity again: What concrete steps are you taking, other than being optimistic, to secure those jobs in Oshawa?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As the member opposite full knows, this is not a new decision. Obviously, we're concerned when there's job loss. Every time there is a job loss in Ontario, we're concerned about that.

But we're also pleased and optimistic when there are job gains. March of this year, a partnership with Toyota Boshoku Canada to expand the Elmira manufacturing plant will create and sustain over 450 jobs; February 2015—just last month—Ford Oakville, 400 new jobs for the Edge facility; and last month as well, GM—the same company that the member opposite is talking about—\$560 million for the Ingersoll facility, which will sustain 3,000 jobs.

I think we do have to look at the overall auto sector story in Ontario, and it is a good one.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Jim Wilson: Back to the Premier: As you know, the GM commitments that were made during the bailout are set to expire in the next few months, right as production at the Oshawa plant comes to an end. GM hasn't committed to staying in Oshawa and, by your answers today, you're not committing to stay in Oshawa, but I'll give you a chance to do so.

Have you given up on Oshawa, or can you promise that they will be there for many years to come?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Economic Development.

Hon. Brad Duguid: Unlike the member opposite and his party, this government has been there to support the auto sector every step of the way. We're talking about a party that, during the depths of the recession, wanted to completely kiss off the auto sector. The quote from them is, "Let those plants close." They would have cost us 500,000 jobs across this province.

We're working hard with GM. We're working hard with our partners in labour. We're going to do everything we can to land a future mandate in Oshawa. We're opti-

mistic and we won't apologize for that. After \$4 billion of investment in this province since November, our auto sector is going in the right direction because we supported them during the recession. Thank God we didn't take your advice, which would have cost us 500,000 jobs directly—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please.

New question.

WORKPLACE SAFETY AND INSURANCE BOARD

Mr. Randy Hillier: My question is to the Premier. I ask you this question today because in the last five years your government has gone through five labour ministers. I'm sure you have a far greater grasp on the WSIB portfolio than any of them, given that your chief of staff was once employed there.

Premier, are you aware of the existence of any slush funds at the WSIB, specifically ones that have existed for many years, despite explicit recommendations to shut those funds down?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Labour.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: The Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, I think all members know, plays a huge role in this province in ensuring that the workplaces and those workers who are injured at work get treated in the way they should.

The member's question—I don't know where it's going, Speaker. Certainly slush funds are not something that I deal with, and that I hope no member of this House deals with when it comes to any aspect of government in the province of Ontario, but I think that the people—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Order.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The next comment will get warned.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I think all members of this House understand that the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board has undergone some changes in the recent past. Those changes have all been positive. They have moved this board from a previous position where they were perhaps not able to fulfill their obligations to a point right now where they're extremely healthy, serving the workers of the province of Ontario and the employers of this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Well, maybe they just don't want to talk about it.

Premier, there has been a fund that has handed out over a million dollars to the Ontario Federation of Labour every year. From what I can tell, there has never been any oversight of this fund whatsoever—no applications,

no reporting and zero value for money. Since 2003, the OFL has received \$12.3 million from this fund.

Premier, why does your minister hand over more than a million dollars a year with zero oversight and no transparency?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: The member will know that it's a partnership that exists in the province of Ontario. This government treats injured workers very, very seriously. This government treats accident prevention very, very seriously.

What that means in the province of Ontario is that we deal with a number of health and safety partners. We deal with business organizations. We deal with labour organizations. We treat them in a financially responsible manner, and also we treat them with respect.

Injured workers in the province of Ontario are served very, very well by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, and I'd be prepared to back them up any day of the week.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Well, it's good to hear that the minister wants to back them up, because nobody else does.

My question is very simple. This grant to the Ontario Federation of Labour has been audited, and it has explicitly been recommended by KPMG to be shut down, as it has absolutely no value for money for the taxpayers of Ontario.

Premier, it hasn't been shut down. I want to know why it hasn't been shut down. KPMG has told you that this program is worthless. It's just a slush fund for the OFL, and it's political pressures from your ministry that is keeping that slush fund going.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, I'll let our partners decide what they think about that question.

What I can tell you about the financial operation of the WSIB is that, under Mr. Marshall's leadership, this board has made significant improvements to its unfunded liability. It was \$9 billion—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please. Thank you.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: The WSIB unfunded liability has decreased by \$1.6 billion since December 31, 2013. What I would say is that we've done that as a result of working with business, working with labour and working with injured workers' groups in the province of Ontario to ensure that we're leaders in this regard.

The premise behind the honourable member's question is something that I simply do not agree with. I would ask him to bring me any other facts he has.

But, certainly, from my perspective, the relationship that we have with organized labour, and that the WSIB has with organized labour—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms. Catherine Fife: To the Premier: Last June, Don Drummond, the hand-picked Liberal cutting czar, went on TV to say that the Liberal plan would mean firing 100,000 people. How many people will the Premier be firing in this spring's budget?

1050

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me say to the member opposite that when she has an opportunity to read the budget, she will see that we are continuing to invest in the people of this province, to invest in their talent and their skills, to invest in infrastructure, to work in partnership with business and to create a dynamic business environment, and to set up a retirement security plan that will allow people to have more security when they retire. In fact, the plan that we ran on—in fact, the fiscal assumptions that that party ran on—are exactly what we are implementing right now.

Yes, we are being responsible and, yes, we have committed to eliminating the deficit by 2017-18. But we are not doing that by cutting and slashing. That's what the opposition party said they were going to do. We are making the investments that we know are going to lead to—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: The Liberals seem to think that Mike-Harris-style cuts and privatized hydro is the only way to invest in Ontario. The Premier seems to think that you can either have public hydro companies or public transit. She doesn't believe that you can have both. But I know that she's wrong.

Just last year, the Auditor General found that \$8 billion was wasted on P3s. When the budget is introduced, the Premier will be insisting she needs to privatize hydro to pay for transit, but will she miraculously be able to find billions to waste on more sweetheart P3 deals?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let's just step back from the premise of this question and make it clear that the reason we are able to make the investments we are making in transit, in roads, in bridges is that we have made some decisions, one of which is to review the assets that are owned by the people of Ontario and to make sure we can leverage those assets in order to invest in the infrastructure that is needed for the 21st century. Underlying that decision is the need to invest in transit and transportation infrastructure.

In fact, the plan that the party opposite ran on—the third party—was the plan that we had constructed, that we had developed, and it's the plan that we are implementing, including a review of—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Final supplementary.

Ms. Catherine Fife: Last April, the Premier of this province said, "We won't cut education, health care or social services," and yet somehow, here we are. The Liberals are cutting education, they're cutting health care, and they're cutting services.

Liberal incompetence and corruption shouldn't cost Ontarians. Can the Premier explain why she can always find the chequebook when she needs to bury a Liberal scandal, but that same chequebook is mysteriously missing when it comes to schools or child care?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It's dangerously close to unparliamentary, and I'm going to remind you, in any other questions coming up, it better not get that close again.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've known the member opposite since she was a school community adviser in Toronto. I know she understands how much money we have put into education. I know she understands that we continue to increase our education budgets. I know she also understands that school boards have to make local decisions.

In May 2014—I just want to make a comment on the member's quote—she said—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Finish, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: In terms of the decisions that we're having to make and the plan that they ran on, I'm going to quote CBC News from May 28, 2014: "Catherine Fife, the Ontario NDP candidate for Kitchener-Waterloo, says her party's proposed savings and accountability minister would look to find efficiencies in the health care and post-secondary education sectors in order to find \$600 million in annual savings."

That's more than we've chosen to do.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Order.

New question.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms. Catherine Fife: Again to the Premier: I don't have to find that money. The Auditor General found that money for you, and it's \$8 billion.

The Liberal government claims that the cupboard is empty, and the only solution is to fire people, cut services and sell off even more of the hydro system to Bay Street speculators.

I think we can agree that there is a problem with the books. It's Liberal incompetence, pure and simple. Wasting \$1 billion on gas plants, \$1 billion on eHealth, hundreds of millions on Ornge and a whopping \$8 billion on sweetheart deals for private developers will do that. That's what happens. It will create a problem with the books. But the good news is that there are solutions, Premier, like stopping P3s, closing HST loopholes or cracking down on millionaire CEOs in the public sector.

Is the Premier going to keep cutting schools and firing nurses so that she can afford to blow billions on P3s and corporate HST giveaways?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: You know, Mr. Speaker, what's interesting is, if we look across the world really,

we look at jurisdictions that are building infrastructure, we look at jurisdictions—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Look across the world. No other government is under more investigation.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —making sure that they have the ability to upgrade the infrastructure that will allow them to compete in the 21st century. You will see governments that are working with the private sector.

Now, I know the NDP basically doesn't want to change anything. They don't want to review the assets. They don't want to change the alcohol distribution system. They don't want to build transit and transportation infrastructure. They basically want to maintain the status quo, as though that will make us competitive in the 21st century. Well, it won't, Mr. Speaker.

We're going to be competitive, we're going to move ahead and we're going to do that by making the decisions that will allow us to invest in this province.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Last June, the Premier of this province said, "Will we implement a program of layoffs? Absolutely not."

Fifty nurses are being fired at CHEO; 42 nurses in Sudbury; 22 nurses in Cambridge; 15 nurses in Leamington; 18,000 nursing hours in New Liskeard; 15 PSWs in Guelph; 38 full-time equivalents in Timmins; seven full-time equivalents in Ottawa. I would call that a program of layoffs. What does the Premier call it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I call it not even half the story because, as those changes are happening, there is hiring going on. We are investing in the health care system; more than \$21 billion in health care infrastructure; 23—

Interjection.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Twenty-three new hospitals have been built or are under way since 2003; 5,000 doctors since 2003 and 24,000 nurses.

Is the health care system in a transition? Absolutely. Are we moving more care into the community? Absolutely. Have the funding formulas changed for hospitals? Yes, they have, but that doesn't mean there are fewer people in the system. That means we're delivering services in ways that people demand and need, and improving service in health care.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Ms. Catherine Fife: You know, Premier, the people of this province aren't interested in your stories. They're interested in services. When a senior wonders why they can't get care from a nurse, the Premier will say it's because the well is dry. When a student is wondering why their neighbourhood school is closing, the Premier will say it's because the well is dry. When a parent has to quit their job because their affordable child care space is cut,

the Premier will say it's because the well is dry. But when a Liberal-friendly construction firm shows up looking for a P3 contract with plenty of fat, the Liberals get out the chequebook, and when there is a Liberal scandal—

Hon. Brad Duguid: Give us one example of that ever happening.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister of Economic Development, come to order.

Ms. Catherine Fife:—let the good times roll.

Will the Premier do the right thing? Will she clean up the corruptions and scandals—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. The Minister of Economic Development chose to continue heckling after I said to stop. So now he's got two.

Please finish.

Ms. Catherine Fife: So the question: Will the Premier do the right thing? Will you clean up the mess that is this government, address the scandals and start putting the people of this province ahead of Liberal friends?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Underpinning the question that the member of the third party is asking is, will we stop changing things? Will we stop transforming government? Will we stop building? Will we stop investing in education so that we can have a 21st-century education system for our kids? Will we stop investing in transforming the health care system? No, Mr. Speaker, we won't. We are going to continue those investments. We are going to continue to work with our health care providers, with our educators, to make the changes that are necessary.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy House leader.

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Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The third party doesn't believe we should be investing in transit. They don't believe we should be investing in transportation infrastructure. They don't believe we should change anything. We do not ascribe to that belief system. We believe there must be change, and we believe that the investments we are making right now are necessary for the 21st-century economy.

PREMIER'S RECORD

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is to the Premier. Good morning, Premier.

Yesterday, her government called anti-SLAPP legislation for debate. Ontarians do see through this, in the face of a SLAPP suit initiated by the Premier herself against

myself and the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook. She's suing me—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order.

Please finish.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: She's suing me for comparing her to Richard Nixon.

But Richard Nixon's tapes had an 18-and-a-half-minute gap. The Pat Sorbara and Gerry Loughheed tapes in the Sudbury by-election scandal are there for the whole province to hear or listen to. In fact, the Sorbara-Loughheed tapes are the subject of not one, but two criminal investigations.

Now that the Premier has outpaced the former Premier, Dalton McGuinty, in criminal investigations into her office, the Premier's office, doesn't she think it's time to stop muzzling the opposition and withdraw that lawsuit?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The lawsuit to which the member opposite refers is the one in which I have obviously—

Interjections.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have kept it in place, Mr. Speaker, because the comments made by the members from Niagara West—Glanbrook and Nepean—Carleton were untrue and they were without evidence.

I am always, and have been, willing to debate the truth. I was always willing to debate the relocations of the gas plants. That's fair, but absolutely unfounded, baseless allegations are not.

All I'm saying is that I'm always willing to debate the truth, but not unfounded allegations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Let's debate the truth right here. The biggest threat to the Premier's reputation is she herself. Her debt-bed conversion to selling off Hydro, selling beer and wine in grocery stores, and eliminating 100,000 public service jobs, like nurses at CHEO and education workers at the Toronto District School Board, are everything she campaigned against, everything she told this assembly she would fight against if she became Premier.

Her support for anti-SLAPP legislation flies in the face of everything she has done in the last year. There are now four criminal investigations into her government—two into her own office—since she initiated this latest SLAPP suit. She has two new scandals in SAMS and social housing. All of that is fact.

All I'm saying here today, Premier, is do the right thing. Allow the opposition to question you without any repercussions. Withdraw that suit and do the right thing for the people of this province.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, when I took that step, I did not take it lightly. My only contention is that we should be dealing in the truth—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Leeds—Grenville, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The member opposite knows full well that I spent day after day after day—

Mr. Steve Clark: You didn't want the truth.

Hon. James J. Bradley: I'm calling Tony Clement.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds—Grenville, too, continued after I asked him to stop. He's got two.

The deputy House leader is now warned.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Who's next?
Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I spent day after day here in this House and in front of committee, answering questions about the gas plant relocations—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Good old Watergate Wynne.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nepean—Carleton, come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: All I'm suggesting is that we should deal in the truth and not in allegations.

In terms of the decisions that we have made since the election and the plan that we're implementing, it's exactly what I ran on. It's exactly what I said I was going to do. We said we were going to review the assets. We said we were going to balance the budget by 2017-18. We said we were going to invest in transit and transportation infrastructure—none of which they agreed with, Mr. Speaker, but we are implementing the plan that we ran on.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Premier. Premier, it's pretty clear and categoric when you listen to Pat Sorbara on the tapes with Mr. Olivier what it is that she was doing. She was offering Mr. Olivier a job or an appointment in order to have him stand down so that he could nominate the chosen candidate in Sudbury.

So my question is this: Was the Premier in the room when Pat Sorbara made that phone call?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: There's an investigation going on. That investigation is not going on in this House. That investigation is happening outside of this Legislature. I will work with the authorities, Mr. Speaker. I have said that all along. I will continue to say that and I will do that. That investigation is taking place outside the Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, 135 questions and we still don't have an answer to the basic questions. So I ask the Premier the question. Pat Sorbara made a phone call to Mr. Olivier. She was categoric in saying, "Please stand aside and nominate our chosen candidate, and if you do that, we'll give you a job or an appointment." My question to you was a simple one: Did you or did you not be party to that discussion by being in the room when Pat Sorbara made the phone call; yes or no?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: When I say that I am going to co-operate and have been co-operating with the authorities, I'm talking about the authorities whose responsibility is to conduct the investigation. And with all due respect to the member opposite, he is not one of those people, and that investigation is not taking place in this House. It is taking place outside this House, and that is where I will be working with the authorities, Mr. Speaker.

RING OF FIRE

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: My question is for the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Mr. Speaker, over the past—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Is it about Pat Sorbara?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins—James Bay is warned.

Carry on.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Over the past year, there was news of Cliffs resources moving away from their investments in eastern Canada as they restructured their operations and planned to sell assets. Some of those assets are in the Ring of Fire.

Yesterday, we heard that Noront Resources had entered into an agreement to acquire Cliffs resources' assets in the Ring of Fire. The news that the company's assets are being purchased to be developed is big news for northern Ontario and for our province as a whole.

Can the minister please inform the House of this recent news coming out of the Ring of Fire?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: I want to thank the hard-working member from Sudbury for that question.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very good news that Noront Resources has entered into an agreement to acquire Cliffs' assets in the Ring of Fire.

Applause.

Hon. Michael Gravelle: Thank you very much.

As everyone knows, Noront has been working continuously for some time to develop their Eagle's Nest nickel project in the Ring of Fire. We, quite frankly, expect that they will do the same with these chromite properties that they will be acquiring. And with Noront now acquiring those, obviously when the court approval has to go through—when they do acquire those properties, essentially they'll be affirming their commitment to the Ring of Fire and validating this government's commitment to developing this region. We very much recognize the tremendous potential of the Ring of Fire, and now it's very, very clear that industry does as well.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you to the minister for his response.

This investment by industry affirms the message that I and this government have been sharing with my community on the incredible mineral potential right here in Ontario. I know we're a world leader in mining, but what is just as important to understand is that Ontario is a world leader in mineral financing—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: We used to be a world leader in mining.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Nipissing.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Anyone who spent time at PDAC this year wouldn't be surprised to know that more global mining projects get financed in Toronto than any other financial centre in the world.

I understand that Noront has worked to secure these assets with the support of another company, Franco-Nevada. Having these two companies investing in northern Ontario holds very exciting potential for northern Ontario and Ontario. Will the minister explain what this investment means to the province?

Hon. Michael Gravelle: It's very well put by the member for Sudbury in terms of Ontario being such an attractive destination for mining investment. There's no doubt about it. This particular proposed acquisition confirms what we've been saying all along: that the business case for the Ring of Fire remains incredibly strong.

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This investment by Noront Resources—I should say, I recently joined Noront at the Prospectors and Developers Association conference when they received the 2015 environmental and social responsibility award, a pretty special award for them as well.

When they joined in a partnership with Franco-Nevada—Franco-Nevada being one of the world's top mining royalty firms—that demonstrates that the significant potential of the Ring of Fire continues to be a very attractive investment.

It's important to note as well that there's interest from many companies. Over 20 companies have got claims in the region to develop the significant resources in the Ring of Fire.

We continue to be very committed to it. We're excited about this investment.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: My question today is for the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Minister, for many months now, Durham College has been trying to partner with the construction industry to build a multi-million dollar tower crane training program facility and achieve training status at Durham College. I understand that MTCU staff, Durham College, RESCON and other partners are all prepared to go ahead. Only your office has not signed off.

When can we expect you to make a positive decision and support a private-public partnership that will train additional tower crane operators for our construction industry?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I want to thank the member for that question. Our government is committed to skills training in the province of Ontario. That's why we created the College of Trades a few years ago, and the college is making great progress in terms of serving the public as well as serving the tradespeople.

In terms of the question, we are working very closely with the training service providers. We have a number of training service providers across the province where they train skilled people for our province of Ontario in 152 areas of skilled trades. We will continue to monitor the supply of skilled tradespeople in Ontario and we will continue to work with the training centres across the province of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: Thank you very much. You really didn't dwell on my question very much, Minister.

Minister, we know you are under pressure from the hoisting engineers not to grant Durham College tower crane training status, but look at the facts: The proposal will cost MTCU no additional money and it is supported by your own staff. No one should have a monopoly on training, including labour groups.

The private-public partnership will create competition. It would increase qualified operators working under safer conditions. Durham College has a remarkable record on all of its training programs.

Everyone is onside to get started on this facility, including the PC caucus. Will you do the right thing, immediately show leadership, approve the Durham College proposal and quit playing politics with a decision that is actually a no-brainer decision?

Hon. Reza Moridi: I thank the member for that question.

We have 24 community colleges across the province of Ontario. They are great partners in terms of skills training in the province of Ontario, along with a number of training centres which are run by various groups across the province of Ontario.

Actually, this afternoon, I'll be meeting with the president of Durham College to discuss this matter.

As I said earlier, we keep a very close eye on and monitor the supply and training of skilled tradespeople for the province of Ontario, not only in that particular field but in every one of those 152 skilled trades areas in the province of Ontario.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, your Minister of Education said that funding cuts to schools were "preposterous," but behind closed doors the Liberals are saying the exact opposite. Internal documents show that schools face cuts of up to 2% under the Liberals' next budget. That means cuts to special education and ESL programs for the most vulnerable kids. It means more school closures and it means job cuts for education workers.

When will the Premier stand up and finally admit that she wants to cut 2%, or up to \$500 million, from schools across the province?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Just to repeat what the Minister of Education has said repeatedly: Our government has increased school funding to about \$22.5 billion this year. We continue to increase funding. That's a 56.5% increase since 2003.

That's in the face of declining enrolment. Not only have we increased funding, but we've actually increased per pupil funding when there are fewer students in the system.

We have done that. We will continue to increase funding to make sure that boards have the resources that they need, but those local decisions are just that. They have to be made locally. That's why school boards exist. I believe in school boards. I believe that trustees have a very important role to play, and that role is to make those local decisions that are in the best interests of the kids in their communities.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mrs. Lisa Gretzky: Premier, I'd like to point out that, because of Liberal waste and scandal, and because of chronic underfunding of education, you've forced trustees to close schools.

Under the Education Act, the minister has a responsibility to close the gaps in student achievement, but Liberal cuts to education will only make those gaps grow even wider. The TDSB is already cutting 50 special education teachers and support staff because of Liberal cuts. That means larger class sizes and less support for the most vulnerable kids.

Across the province, \$500 million in cuts will pull the rug out from underneath students in every community. How can this government defend cuts to education that fly in the face of its responsibility to students?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: As we continue to increase funding across the province, we will work with boards to make sure that they are able to make the decisions that are in the best interests of students. That includes decisions around consolidation of schools.

The fact is that we have built 725 new schools in this province—

Miss Monique Taylor: Yes, but how many did you close?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Member from Hamilton Mountain.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: —and more than 700 additions and renovations.

If the member opposite from Hamilton, I think, who was heckling understood—the fact is that populations change, and that school boards have to adapt to those populations and have to make decisions to deliver the best program to students. Sometimes that means renovating a school. Sometimes it means consolidating two schools. Sometimes it means closing one school and building a new school. All of those options are things that school boards look at, and that's how you get the best program delivery at the local level for students.

LABOUR DISPUTE

Mrs. Laura Albanese: My question is for the Minister of Labour. Speaker, the workers of Crown Metal Packaging have been on strike for 18 months, walking the picket line for two winters now in the bitter cold. Many of these workers live in my riding of York South-Weston.

The last time I asked the minister a question on this issue, he made it clear that the ongoing labour disruption at Crown Metal was concerning to him. The minister stated here in this House that the dispute does not follow the norm in terms of labour relations in our province, and he strongly urged both parties to go back to the table and negotiate a fair deal.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the minister: What are you doing as the Minister of Labour to get to the bottom of this matter?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Speaker, on this side of the House we believe—and I think all members do—that the best deals we can get in this are negotiated at the bargaining table through collective bargaining. The Ministry of Labour provides assistance. We provide conciliation assistance. We provide mediation assistance when the parties ask us to intervene in that regard. We have excellent conciliators and excellent mediators.

Sometimes, though, the relationship between those parties breaks down and we need further action. This is what I think has happened at Crown Metal. We supervised the last-offer vote, by request of the employer, just last year. The employees overwhelmingly rejected that offer.

Now, after very, very careful consideration, I've taken the rare step of announcing that we're appointing an industrial inquiry commission, led by the very well-respected Morton Mitchnick, to inquire into how to resolve the current work stoppage that we're seeing at Crown Metal. I think this is an unusual move; under the circumstances, though, I think it's the right move.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Mrs. Laura Albanese: I want to thank the minister for that answer, but the employees at Crown Metal need answers sooner rather than later. They've been out on the lines, as I mentioned earlier, for 18 months. They are tired of walking the lines and chanting when no one seems to be listening, so we need to let them know that we are listening. It's time that the workers know that our government has their backs, and that we won't let their struggle go unnoticed.

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Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Labour has said that he has appointed Morton Mitchnick as the head of the industrial inquiry commission. Will the minister please explain to this House what the industrial inquiry commission is and what he plans to accomplish through it?

Hon. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Thanks to the member for that very fine question. The Labour Relations Act in this province grants few special powers to the Minister of Labour to intervene when we're having a labour dispute. Under section 37 of the act, I've appointed an industrial inquiry commission.

As I said, it's being led by the very well respected Morton Mitchnick. He's going to look into and report back on the dispute. He's going to bring forward some recommendations as to how he sees us being able to move forward. He has previously served in the role as chair of the OLRB. He has been a panel arbitrator in a

wide variety of sectors across this continent. The industrial inquiry commissioner will have three weeks to consult with the parties involved. He'll report back to me within 14 days of completion.

Speaker, I've got full confidence in the abilities of Mr. Mitchnick. I think he's going to provide sound, reasonable advice. It's essential to understand the best deals are made at the table. I remain very hopeful—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

New question.

MILTON COURTHOUSE

Mr. Ted Arnott: My question is for the Attorney General. Why is the government dragging its feet on the approval of a new courthouse in Halton region?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I thank you for this question. I know that you have been asking me, and many of the members on my side too, about this new courthouse. It's a priority for this government.

I have been to Milton to visit the courthouse there. I know that we need a new courthouse. It's a priority, again I'm saying, but we'll have to wait and see, with the next budget.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Ted Arnott: The urgent need for a new courthouse in Halton region was covered in a big article in the Toronto Star on January 23. I actually toured the Milton courthouse last September to see for myself, and simply put, the existing court facility in Milton is aging, overcrowded and inadequate in terms of security and privacy.

I've written to the Attorney General numerous times and spoken to her numerous times about this problem. I also asked for a briefing for the Halton-area MPPs from the AG's staff on the process for new courthouse approvals. We attended that briefing on December 2, and we were led to believe that a new Halton courthouse was indeed a priority, as the minister just said today. But just weeks later, the government announced an addition to the courthouse in Brampton, and no mention was made of the need in Halton region.

My question for the Attorney General is quite simple: When will you announce approval for a new Halton courthouse?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Again, yes, there are quite a few requests on this side of the House. The members on my side are asking me on a regular basis about the new courthouse. Yes, I am working with the judiciary. I'm working with the lawyers' association. I've been there, visiting. There is need.

The number one priority that is going forward is here in Toronto, but the next one, Milton—it's a growing area, and the decision on where the courthouse will be built is not made yet. But I know that there is much need there, and thank you for asking the question again.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: My question is to the Premier. The Liberals have decided to ignore families in the city

by cutting \$86 million from social housing this year alone. That's what the Liberals are telling Toronto. They're telling them: Forget about fixing the backlog for repairs, forget about easing the strain on emergency shelters, and worst of all, forget about the 87,000 families who are desperately waiting for affordable housing—the worst in Ontario's history.

Speaker, does the Premier have any clue what her cuts to social housing will actually mean for struggling families in Toronto?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. She has a well-earned reputation for being a great advocate in Toronto, especially on the social housing front. So, thank you for that.

I just want to go and correct the impression, though. There has been no cut to social housing in Toronto. In fact, the redevelopment of Regent Park and the legacy of hundreds of homes connected with the Pan Am Games augurs very, very well.

What the member opposite, I think, is referring to is the end of the Toronto pooling agreement. Toronto was projecting a shortfall this year of some \$86 million, and they may have decided to tag that to something; I don't know. But that has been offset by the uploading we've gone through. In fact, provincial support of Toronto has increased by almost 700% since 2003.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: Since 2003, some \$600 million-plus has been provided.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Hon. Ted McMeekin: The total provincial assistance—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier: The mayor of Toronto, John Tory, and the entire city council would beg to differ with that response. The Liberals can talk about being progressive, but no progressive government would cut \$86 million from Toronto's social housing budget. Over five years, the Liberal cuts will mean a half-billion-dollar funding gap, leading to service cuts and even longer wait-lists for affordable housing in the city, which now runs between 10 and 12 years. Even more families will be left waiting just to get the housing they can afford.

Again to the Premier: How can the Premier defend such deep, real cuts to social housing?

Hon. Ted McMeekin: I'd like to elaborate a little bit further on our relationship with Toronto. In 2015, the total benefit of provincial uploads for Toronto is estimated to be \$460 million, or about 12% of the residential tax base.

I don't know if the member opposite recalls this, but I will remind her, if she doesn't: Ontario has already forgiven the outstanding Toronto debenture loan of some \$230 million. We're going out of our way to not only

reverse the downloading of the previous government but to work with Mayor Tory and his council to, as adequately as we can, do an even better job on the social housing front.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: My question is to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. I recently saw a very disturbing story on the CBC show *Go Public* about a senior citizen who was misled by a door-to-door salesman peddling furnaces. This senior citizen signed an agreement to rent a furnace—an agreement that she did not understand. As a result, she was charged exorbitant fees.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident in this province. Many Ontarians will sign contracts they don't understand, will be pressured into signing contracts for services they don't necessarily need and be charged significantly higher prices for those services as a result. As the company pushing this contract would not address the problem with this senior, she had to go to the media.

The Minister of Government and Consumer Services has been in touch with officials at the CBC, with this senior citizen and with the company.

Could the minister please inform the House as to what steps his ministry has taken—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you, Minister?

Hon. David Orazietti: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the member from Etobicoke–Lakeshore for his timely question and his consumer advocacy. You can see that he's passionate about the issue.

I'm pleased that the company has agreed to replace the individual's furnace and adjust the payments accordingly. Prior to this incident, our ministry had already placed the company on the Consumer Beware List, which alerts consumers about organizations with poor business practices. In fact, through our ministry, we're monitoring these businesses, and this particular one had about 92 different complaints, mostly for misrepresentation.

We've taken steps to protect Ontarians and consumers from predatory door-to-door practices in passing the Stronger Protection for Ontario Consumers Act in December 2013, which was well received in this Legislature. The legislation addresses door-to-door sales for water heater rentals, which was a top complaint, requiring a 20-day cooling-off period before entering into the final stage of the agreement, demanding a plain-language contract as well as requiring a call-back to consumers.

1130

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Peter Z. Milczyn: I want to thank the minister for updating us on the situation that was reported on the CBC's *Go Public*, and for his ministry's proactive approach to the problematic ramifications of these kinds of door-to-door sales.

I know door-to-door sales have been an ongoing concern for residents in Etobicoke–Lakeshore as well as

throughout the province, and they present really terrible moments of intense pressure, sometimes on the most vulnerable residents. I look forward to seeing the implementation of stricter door-to-door regulations coming into effect next month.

Our government has a history of exploring ways to improve conditions for vulnerable residents, and I'm pleased that the minister is raising this important issue and has acted to resolve this accordingly.

Minister, can you please provide advice to Ontarians on how they can better protect themselves from aggressive, high-pressure door-to-door sales tactics?

Hon. David Orazietti: Thank you—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. I did stop the clock. I'd like to give all members a reminder that when you get warned, the next step is to step out. I just thought I'd remind people.

Hon. David Orazietti: Thanks, Speaker.

I just want to remind all folks that we require a cooling-off period for sales or rentals of any heating device. This means a minimum 10-day window to reflect on his or her decision.

Secondly, I want to encourage all consumers to make sure that they understand which company the salesperson represents. Local utility companies, municipalities, government agencies and regulatory bodies do not sell door to door, so anyone trying to present themselves as such is misleading.

Ontarians should never give out their private information by showing their utility bills or personal identification, and as part of any consideration, consumers should check the Consumer Beware List.

If any Ontarian feels pressured or taken advantage of by these unscrupulous practices, they should report it to Consumer Protection Ontario, where it will be followed up on.

Awareness is the starting point of any major transaction, and we're working hard to ensure that Ontarians ask the right questions.

ROAD SAFETY

Mr. Michael Harris: My question is to the Minister of Transportation. Minister, yesterday at committee, we saw government members throw up roadblocks to enhanced road safety on your own distracted driving legislation. We saw government members balking at giving opposition members a chance to even discuss one of the 34 amendments being proposed to strengthen the legislation. I find that difficult to understand, Minister.

But what I find even more difficult to understand is why your own parliamentary secretary voted down a specific section of your own bill that will impact enhanced impaired driving penalties. Minister, can you explain what's going on here?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I always welcome the opportunity to stand in my place in this Legislature and to talk about the importance of road safety, and particularly Bill 31, which is the bill that that member is referencing.

Just to remind everyone—and I know this was dealt with at committee yesterday and continues to be dealt with at committee—this is a bill that, for the very first time, will ensure that we have drug-impaired sanctions included in legislation here in the province of Ontario. It will increase the fines, penalties and sanctions for distracted driving.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: It does contain a number of other provisions.

I was thrilled, in fact, because at both first and second reading, it was a bill that enjoyed unanimous support in this Legislature. I know members on all sides of this House, representing communities right across this province, understand the importance of us moving forward with these measures so that we can continue to be a province that has such a strong track record for road and highway safety.

I think it's important for the committee to continue to do its work to get the bill back here for third reading so we can pass it.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Harris: Back to the minister: Minister, we want to make Ontario roads safer. That's why we, and the NDP, put forth a series of worthy amendments to enhance road safety—for instance, to legislate demerit points for distracted driving, to limit window tinting—a suggestion moved forward by the Ottawa Police Service—and to improve medical review of licences. Again, we want to make Ontario roads safer. Yet your members are voting down sections of your own bill, and you're not even willing to listen to opposition calls for enhanced safety amendments.

Minister, your Premier has called for partnership, not partisanship. Which is it for you?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Well, Speaker, I'm not going to take advantage of the opportunity provided to me with that last comment, because it's important for me to focus on road safety. I know that the committee that's reviewing Bill 31 will continue over the course of this week and the next number of days to do its work, and that committee will do the extraordinary job that it continues to do.

But I want to go back to the importance of making sure that Bill 31 becomes—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Lanark, second time.

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I appreciate the member in this particular circumstance bringing forward his support for our desire to make sure that our roads and highways remain safe.

I'm going to let that committee continue to do its work, and I'm happy to work with that member and other members on all sides of this House to make sure that we continue to have the safest roads and highways, as we have consistently for the last 13 years, and are first or second in North America for road user safety.

GOVERNMENT ANTI-RACISM PROGRAMS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is for the Premier. Premier, I'm sure all members will agree it is always a privilege to rise and speak from this place in one of the most diverse cities in the history of the world, within the most diverse province of this country.

This past Saturday was the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, where we are reminded that not only does systemic racism continue to exist elsewhere, it persists here as well. Income inequality, unemployment and precarious employment continue to disproportionately affect racialized communities in the province.

Will the Premier commit today to establishing an anti-racism directorate that will speak to issues of racial inequality?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. There are many, many ways, I would suggest, across government that we are working to increase equality, to increase equity.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker. When I came into office, and when I was made Minister of Education in 2006, I discovered that the word "equity" had been expunged from all ministry documents by the previous government, and I worked very, very hard to put in place a new policy. That's when we developed the equity and inclusive education policy, which later became the body of legislation that has required that the education system basically grapple with these issues.

So, Mr. Speaker, whether it's labour policies or whether it's through education policies, our government has worked very, very hard to make sure that people are treated fairly no matter their background.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Speaker, the NDP government of Ontario first established an anti-racism secretariat to address persistent racial inequalities and inequities in our province. Unfortunately, this position was cut by the Conservatives, and the Liberals passed legislation in 2006; nine years later, they have failed to establish a new anti-racism secretariat.

Will the Premier commit today to strike a task force that will examine issues of systemic racism in the province and create a new anti-racism secretariat?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Again, I appreciate the question from the member opposite. This is something that I have given a fair bit of thought to, because it is an issue that's very, very important to me. If you know and recognize the people in this caucus, you'll understand that it's important to this whole caucus that we deal with this issue.

What I know is that as public policy evolves, there are different ways of dealing with issues. I believe that when the NDP government had that secretariat in place, that was a very important thing to do. But I believe today what's important is that we deal with these issues across government; in every single ministry, in every single

policy, we make sure that we put that lens on that ensures equity and that we ask the questions of our policy to make sure that those policies are going to promote equity in the province.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Ms. Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of Community and Social Services. Minister, yesterday I had the pleasure of joining you in my riding of Kitchener Centre to announce a very important update on direct funding targets for people who are living with developmental disabilities. As part of the \$810-million developmental services investment strategy in our 2014 budget, your ministry committed to eliminating existing wait-lists for people who are in great need of direct funding. As you know, Minister, people who are living with developmental disabilities, their families and front-line workers are telling us that this funding helps them to make individual choices in learning how to live independently.

So, Mr. Speaker, could the minister please share with us the progress that is being made on this funding wait-list?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you to the member for Kitchener Centre for the question.

I was happy to have the member with me at KW Habilitation Services yesterday for some remarkable news. As of February, 2015, 14,000 people now have new direct funding to purchase supports and services. That is 14,000 more children and adults since the 2014 budget. This includes approved funding for 6,000 adults with a developmental disability through Passport, and 8,000 children with a physical or developmental disability through Special Services at Home. Moreover, we have eliminated the 2014 wait-list for Special Services at Home in just eight months—well ahead of the two years in our 2014 budget commitment.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Daiene Vernile: Minister, we were able to witness first-hand a program called LEG Up! where adults with developmental disabilities are learning skills that are getting them job-ready. We watched a class on social skills development, and there are also classes on computer training and food preparation. This very important programming is through the Passport funding.

While all of this is very good news, the developmental services sector has been in very serious need of investment and transformation in other areas for some time. The select committee on developmental disabilities identified other concerns, including the funding assessment process, residential services and the safety of some living options.

Mr. Speaker, how are the minister and her staff responding to all of these other concerns?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: The member does raise some very important points. There are serious concerns facing the developmental services sector in Ontario, and it will continue to undergo significant transformation to meet

growing and changing needs in order to be able to offer the supports that individuals and their families deserve and need. We are continuing to make progress.

Since budget 2014, 525 adults have now received new residential supports as we move toward our commitment of 1,400 new urgent residential supports over four years. Moreover, my ministry is working with community partners to address the large residential services need. This includes the work of the developmental services housing task force, which this month launched a call for proposals on innovative housing solutions.

As I made the commitment to the select committee on developmental disabilities last July when it reported its findings, we are working very hard and we're making significant progress.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There being no deferred votes, this House stands recessed until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1143 to 1500.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Michael Coteau: It's my pleasure to welcome my good friend Sasha Pessos. Sasha, stand up and show them. He's here today to celebrate Greek Independence Day and the flag-raising. He happened to bring his father with him; Nick Pessos is joining us at the Legislature today.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

AGNES MACPHAIL

Mr. Bill Walker: I rise in the House today to recognize the many constituents in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound who will be marking, this week, the 125th anniversary of the birthday of Agnes Campbell Macphail.

As some members may know, Agnes Macphail was born on March 24, 1890, in Proton township in Grey county, known today as Agnes Macphail country. Agnes and her family lived in a three-room log cabin on a 100-acre farm near Hopeville. Sometime later the Macphails moved to Artemesia township—which is also in my riding—where Agnes later worked as a schoolteacher.

As my constituents and those around Ontario gather to honour Agnes's birth, they'll celebrate her life accomplishments that helped to shape our history, such as being the first Canadian woman elected to the House of Commons in Ottawa in 1921 as a member of the Progressive Party of Canada for the Grey Southeast riding. She was re-elected in the 1925, 1926 and 1930 federal elections during her 19-year run as an MP.

In 1929, Agnes was a delegate at the League of Nations in Geneva, and was the first Canadian woman to do so. There she was a member of the World Disarmament Committee.

She was also the first of two women to be elected to this House in 1943 as a member of the Ontario CCF, representing the Toronto riding of York East, known today as Beaches–East York. It was during her run as an MPP that Agnes made her finest legislative mark: championing equal work for Ontario women.

When not serving her constituents in public office, the fearless and tireless Agnes dedicated her time to championing equal rights and fair treatment for everyone.

Macphail's progressive views also led her advocacy for women in the criminal justice system that helped her to found the Elizabeth Fry Society of Canada in 1939. She also worked as an agricultural columnist for the *Globe and Mail* in Toronto.

As we gather to honour the 125th anniversary of Agnes's birth, we're reminded how this fearless and outspoken native of Grey county continues to inspire us and to make us proud.

ROBOTICS COMPETITION

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I'm pleased to bring attention to a wonderful event that is going to be happening in Windsor and Essex county. It's the FIRST Robotics 2015 Windsor-Essex Great Lakes Regional competition, set for April 2 at the University of Windsor's St. Denis Centre.

An article from Dave Waddell of the Windsor Star from March 25 highlights some of the great things that are going to be happening: "50 teams attending the second annual event are charged with developing robots to improve recycling and reuse of natural resources...."

"It requires team building, creativity, critical thinking and an ability to raise the \$10,000 to \$15,000 on average that it costs local teams to create a robot.

"The competition is essentially starting up a company.... You need accountants, business students, graphic artists, web designers and communications people as much as technical design people.' ...

"This is largely an industry-driven event,' said Irek Kusmierczyk, the director of robotics and youth programs for WEtech Alliance." I want to give a shout-out to him. He's a great promoter.

Companies are also backing the effort in this event with financial support: Valiant, which is a tool company in Windsor. This large tool manufacturer has "paid \$50,000 to be the event's platinum sponsor, while local sponsors such as CenterLine, Siemens" and St. Clair College are also chipping in.

"The event will include 10 more teams than a year ago. Teams are composed of up to 30 members and a mentor from industry....

"The best way to describe the atmosphere is it's part NASA, part NASCAR and part Super Bowl with a little rock" mixed in.

Speaker, I can't wait to go and check this out. It sounds like a wonderful initiative. It certainly is great for our region. I commend all those who will be participating.

COMMUNITY MOVIE NIGHT SOIRÉE CINÉMA COMMUNAUTAIRE

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I'm pleased to share that last Thursday my office hosted our first free community movie night for 250 of my constituents. This was at the suggestion of some of my caucus colleagues, so thank you very much.

The event was a grand success, with an overwhelming interest based on the fact that many local schools kindly passed the information to the parents in the community. The event took place at a local movie theatre right by my constituency office, and the movie we played was *Big Hero 6*. That movie, I must say, won the Academy Award for best animated feature, and I can attest as well that it was a great movie for those of all ages.

It was also an absolute pleasure to meet so many young families from Orléans who were in town for March break and hopefully enjoyed the event.

Je suis très emballée à l'idée de revivre cette expérience dans le futur. L'accueil de la communauté fut des plus enrichissants. Cette activité gratuite a permis à plusieurs familles d'Orléans de se retrouver en famille pendant la semaine de relâche pour se divertir à peu de frais.

I am looking forward to making this movie experience a seasonal event.

MINISTER'S AWARD FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: On March 11, Tom Kaszas, director of the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change's Environmental Innovations branch, and Luz Felipe travelled to Blyth, home to my constituency office in Huron, to present Murray and Wilma Scott with the Minister's Award for Environmental Excellence. The Scotts were one of nine recipients across Ontario who demonstrated strong commitment to environmental excellence. Recipients collaborated with schools, industry leaders and volunteers to restore wildlife habitat, conserve water and energy, and prevent pollutants and nutrients from entering our Great Lakes.

Over the past decade, the Scotts have undertaken a number of environmental projects, working closely with the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority. Murray and Wilma controlled their farm's nutrient and sediment runoff through erosion-control berms, new wetlands and a natural channel design.

I'm particularly happy about the recognition the Scott family received. You see, Speaker, I know the farm very well. I grew up with the Scott twins, Meribeth and Melanie, I attended many events at their farm as we grew up, and I even picked stones. Murray was my 4-H calf club leader, and everyone from home will understand when I say that with her creative ways, Wilma inspired my own Christmas spirit. Murray also gave back to the community through the years as a municipal councillor for East Wawanosh and subsequently as deputy mayor for North Huron.

I would like to sincerely congratulate Murray and Wilma for their environmental excellence and for leading by example. I would also like to share with them, and know by this statement, that had I known about and been invited to this presentation, I would have done everything in my power to attend.

INTERGENERATIONAL DAY CANADA

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise to acknowledge the excellent work done by the Toronto Intergenerational Partnerships in Community—TIGP—based in my riding. They are pushing to have Intergenerational Day Canada recognized across the country. This year, the city of Toronto is going to be joining many cities as it proclaims June 1 Intergenerational Day Canada.

Intergenerational Day Canada, June 1, provides an opportunity to raise awareness in daily life of the many benefits that simple and respectful connections between generations bring to education, health and community safety. TIGP in my riding has been successful in bringing together seniors and high school students for social events and for awards ceremonies. It's made life much richer for our seniors, and for our teenagers it's an opportunity to become involved in the community to help people who could well be their grandparents. Stereotypes of both younger and older people are broken down when they learn about each other. Isolation is diminished and empathy grows in both directions.

Intergenerational Day Canada makes a powerful statement about the value of generational connecting within each and every one's neighbourhood. I will be introducing a bill this afternoon, Speaker, to have this Legislature also proclaim June 1 as Intergenerational Day Canada.

GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY

Ms. Soo Wong: I'm pleased to rise today to recognize Greek Independence Day. Greek independence was first declared on March 25, 1821. Celebrating this date each year is a wonderful opportunity to recognize Greece's many contributions to the world. After all, this is the country that gave us democracy and the Olympic Games.

It is also a perfect time to celebrate significant contributions that Ontario's vibrant Greek community has made to our province and to my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt. I'm proud to have constituents who are prominent members of the Greek community, including authors, educators, physicians and other professionals.

This Sunday, March 29, I will be participating in the annual parade through Toronto's Greektown, as I have done every year for over 20 years. Participating in the parade each year brings back many wonderful childhood memories. Having grown up in the riding of Toronto—Danforth, I remember being fascinated by the Greek culture on the Danforth, a street with so much cultural and economic significance to our province.

Cultural diversity is what makes Ontario such a great place to live, work and play. As we celebrate Greek

Independence Day and its history, we also celebrate what makes Ontario so great. Zito É Ellas; Zito to Ontario; Zito to Canada.

1510

ELMIRA MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL

Mr. Michael Harris: Today I am happy to rise to inform the House of a significant event happening in my riding, the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival happening this weekend in Elmira, Ontario.

As many know, the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival is the largest of its kind, and this year they are celebrating their 51st anniversary. Many events are planned, including a magic show, food truck festival, and cooking demos from celebrity chefs.

Going to Elmira is a tradition for my family, as we always kick off springtime with a trip to the festival. We don't hesitate to try all the exciting foods, activities and events featured in Elmira during this Saturday.

Of course, this event wouldn't continue to thrive without the tireless work of more than 2,000 dedicated volunteers who make this event possible each and every year. They do everything from directing traffic to providing sugar bush tours to running games and activities for thousands of excited participants. Their selfless efforts are the reason people from my community and across the world travel to the township of Woolwich for this important festival. I would like to take this time to thank all of the dedicated volunteers of the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival.

Speaker, on a final note, I also want to issue a warning to our rival Mother Flippers team—big pancake challenge happening on Saturday morning. I encourage everybody to participate. I know that Ms. Fife, the member from Kitchener—Waterloo, will have a team in as well. My team, the Batter Kings, have been practising, and we look forward to Saturday's pancake-flipping match.

Mr. Todd Smith: Go Batter Kings!

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The heckles write themselves.

The member from Halton.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: This past Saturday, Ontarians across the province joined together with the rest of the global community to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This day is important to me and countless people around the world.

First proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1966, the day was originally established to commemorate the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, a terrible day when 69 people were killed in South Africa after police opened fire on a peaceful demonstration against apartheid pass

laws. I was born in South Africa and I remember well the stories my parents told me about this horrific event.

As someone who witnessed and experienced the devastating impacts of racial discrimination, this day is a powerful reminder of why my family chose to come to Canada to start a new life—a life where acceptance of everyone, regardless of race, religion or background, is celebrated.

This day is a reminder of where we have been and where we are going to go. There is a lot more work to do. It encourages us all to remain committed to work together to end racial discrimination in all its forms and to renew our commitment to building a world of justice, equality and dignity.

Ontario's diversity is our strength. When we work together, free from inequality and injustice, we're all stronger; we all win.

FOODLAND IN AYR

Mrs. Kathryn McGarry: On Friday, March 13, I had the pleasure of attending the grand opening ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Foodland in Ayr, North Dumfries, in my riding of Cambridge, along with many of the constituents from the community.

There has been a great deal of buildup over the last few months for the opening of Foodland. Residents of North Dumfries have been awaiting the first grocery store open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They have also hired 100 new employees. This new grocery store will provide new-found convenience for my constituents. The store that preceded the new Ayr Foodland was too small and the hours too limited to keep up with the demand.

As I browsed around the store, I noted the wide selection of ready-made meals and great organic section. This provides my constituents better and healthier options for themselves as well as their families.

It was wonderful to attend the opening and to stand next to a sometimes very emotional owner, Todd Bender, and his family in order to cut the ribbon to officially open the store. We also had a band backing up the ribbon cutting to great fanfare. It was a momentous occasion for Todd—a huge accomplishment—and a major addition to my riding of Cambridge.

Speaker, I wanted to note that I stopped by the store again this past Sunday to shop for dinner for my family before heading back to Toronto. As I pulled in, I was struck by how full the parking lot was on a Sunday evening. Many were visiting with each other in the parking lot. The Ayr Foodland is certainly filling a demand. It will be a success story in our community of Cambridge.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made in the order of precedence on the ballot

list for private members' public business such that Mrs. Gretzky assumes ballot item number 56 and Miss Taylor assumes ballot item number 58.

REPORTS BY COMMITTEES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I beg to inform the House that today the Clerk received a report on intended appointments dated March 24, 2015, for the Standing Committee on Government Agencies.

Pursuant to standing order 108(f)(9), the report is deemed to be adopted.

Report deemed adopted.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

INTERGENERATIONAL DAY CANADA ACT, 2015

LOI DE 2015 SUR LA JOURNÉE INTERGÉNÉRATIONNELLE AU CANADA

Mr. Tabuns moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 81, An Act to proclaim Intergenerational Day Canada / Projet de loi 81, Loi proclamant la Journée intergénérationnelle au Canada.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I had an opportunity to expound on this earlier. This bill proclaims June 1 in each year as Intergenerational Day Canada. I think it would be a fine thing for the province to do.

DSPT INTERNATIONAL (CANADA) INC. ACT, 2015

Mr. Colle moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill Pr15, An Act to revive DSPT International (Canada) Inc.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 86, this bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills.

MOTIONS

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to move a motion without notice.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is seeking unanimous consent to move a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I move that the opposition day motion tabled by the member for Hamilton Centre be moved by the member for Kitchener–Waterloo.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Mr. Naqvi moves that the opposition day motion tabled by the member for Hamilton Centre be moved by the member for Kitchener–Waterloo. Do we agree? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Hon. Michael Coteau: Ontario's diversity is a great social and economic strength. We speak more than 200 languages and we represent over 200 different countries. I am therefore pleased to speak in support of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination that the world marked last Saturday, March 21.

This date is forever remembered for a historical tragedy. In 1960, in Sharpeville, South Africa, police opened fire and killed 69 protesters. These protesters were peacefully demonstrating against apartheid laws. They left their homes that morning and marched to give voice to their right to travel freely in their own country. Sixty-nine of those protesters never returned home that day, but they are not forgotten, and the Sharpeville massacre is remembered throughout the world.

1520

The United Nations has chosen this day as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This tragedy in one country became a call for action to fight against racism in all countries.

Here in Ontario, we are proud of our rich diversity. We recognize that much of our quality of life was built by immigrants here in this country.

We also know that racism has been part of our history as well. In recent decades, we've made real progress in changing attitudes, and we now live in a country and a province which knows that diversity is a great strength. Governments create policies to promote inclusion, and the Human Rights Commission is now in its sixth decade of preventing all forms of discrimination, including, of course, racial discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, racism still takes place, and that's why the UN uses this day and asks us all to come together to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination. And in this House, all members pledge to do just that.

We must continue to remember the struggles of those who have fought for our freedom here in our country, and we must continue the work that they started so that one

day racial discrimination will be a distant memory in Ontario's past.

We will continue to fight against discrimination. We will promote understanding and goodwill. We will not rest until equality exists for everyone in this great country and around the world.

FARM SAFETY

Hon. Jeff Leal: I rise in the House today in recognition of Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, which took place last week from March 15 to 21. This annual week-long public education campaign focuses on the importance of safety practices on Canadian farms. This year's theme was "Be the Difference," encouraging individuals, organizations and communities to do their part to ensure that Canada's farms are safe places to live, work and indeed raise a family.

It saddens me to say that fatal accidents happen on Ontario farms every year. Thankfully, the number of these accidents has steadily been decreasing. This is due in no small part to the efforts of organizations like the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association and Workplace Safety and Prevention Services of Ontario. Farm accidents can have a devastating impact physically, financially and emotionally. Individuals, organizations and communities all have a significant role to play in making Ontario farms safe.

Safe farms are more profitable and more competitive, all of which is good for Ontario's economy.

Including health care costs and lost productivity, the annual cost of farm injuries in Ontario is estimated at \$116 million, but on-farm safety is about far more than the bottom line. This is about doing the right thing to protect our farm workers so they can continue their excellent work to produce the good things that are grown, harvested and made right here in Ontario. The good news is that most injuries are preventable as long as producers, farm managers and farm workers understand the hazards on their farms and know how to manage them.

Every day, countless injuries and fatalities are avoided thanks to the education campaigns like Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. My ministry works to support farm safety, and I'm proud to say that, through the hard work of Ontario public sector employees and engaged farm communities, they're hoping to make a difference.

We are pleased to support Workplace Safety and Prevention Services of Ontario, one of the Ministry of Labour's health and safety associations, in their delivery of farm safety education programs. We have a long history of partnering with the WSPS to develop safety projects designed to reach farm families, youth and older workers.

Through the federal, provincial and territorial Growing Forward 2 initiative, we are also funding WSPS's Spanish-language workplace safety materials to help those new Canadians who are making a difference in Ontario. Our province and our economy benefit from the efforts of temporary foreign agricultural workers. The

majority of Ontario's seasonal farm workers come to us from Mexico. They need information on how to work safely on our farms and they need to do it in a form that they can understand.

These materials go a long way in protecting our seasonal workers and in meeting the Growing Forward 2 objectives of enhancing labour productivity and indeed managing risk. We've also seen the need to tailor efforts in reaching our Mennonite and Amish farmers and are supporting efforts in that regard.

Currently, only one in 10 Ontario farmers has a written safety plan. My ministry supported the FarmSafe 101 interactive workshop which happened in Guelph on March 17—St. Patrick's Day. The event assisted farmers in developing their own plans to help increase safety awareness and decrease risk on their farms.

I am proud to stand with the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture in recognizing last week's important safety programming. These important organizations seek to empower producers and their families with the information resources they need to make their farms safe.

Mr. Speaker, our primary agricultural sector in Ontario employs more than 86,000 people, and we have a solemn duty to ensure each and every one of them works in a safe environment. I would like to thank the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, Workplace Safety and Prevention Services and every organization that supported this initiative for their tireless efforts to improve safety on Canada's farms.

I encourage all of Ontario's farm businesses, workers and communities to embrace the spirit of this year's campaign to "Be the Difference" and make our farms a safe place to work.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is now time for responses.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm honoured to rise on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus to speak on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which occurs each year on March 21. On that very day in 1960 in Sharpeville, South Africa, a pernicious massacre took place where police fatally shot 69 Black demonstrators and wounded 180. These victims were simply peaceful demonstrators protesting the discriminatory apartheid laws that imposed restrictions on Black South Africans.

Since 1966, this important day has served as an opportunity for people worldwide to voice their concerns with respect to promoting equality across all backgrounds and cultures. This day is internationally observed with a series of events and activities geared towards combatting racial discrimination, reminding people of its negative

implications and encouraging tolerance in our communities. It is an occasion to renew and perpetuate our commitment to building a world of justice and equality.

This year's theme, "Learning from Historical Tragedies to Combat Racial Discrimination Today," explores racism and racial discrimination at a fundamental level by examining its root causes. This theme emphasizes the importance of learning the lessons that history has imparted to ultimately eradicate racism.

Past human rights tragedies such as slavery, apartheid and genocides like the Holocaust must never be forgotten. I have a personal tie to the Holocaust, as my father and former MPP Paul Yakabuski served overseas during the Second World War and fought against the evils of this genocide in the name of justice and equity. We must use the lessons gained from such horrific events as a means of tackling racially driven discrimination, especially considering the millions of people who are still victims today.

On behalf of the Ontario PC caucus, I encourage everyone in our province to always remember the importance of our shared values of freedom, democracy and human rights. As we celebrate this day, it should be the goal of each and every one of us that our work will not be done until racial discrimination exists only in the history books.

FARM SAFETY

Mr. Toby Barrett: Spring has sprung, and farmers are certainly looking forward to getting out into their fields. The recent Canadian Agricultural Safety Week is good timing to heighten safety awareness for everyone. Many farms in our province are family operations. The home doubles as an industrial workplace, and safety does have to come first for both young and old.

1530

The strength of agriculture in Ontario lies in our farm organizations. The most important meetings to attend are the farm safety meetings. It's all about prevention, and prevention of accidents.

In the early 1980s, I got back into farming in a cash crop partnership. I joined the Norfolk Farm Safety Association. Then I missed a meeting one night, and went back the next month and I'm the president. In Haldimand-Norfolk, we have so many small farms—fruit and vegetable—and labour-intensive farms, with workers from Jamaica and Mexico, as was mentioned by our minister.

We had a great farm safety group; this was back in the early 1980s. We would go into schools—poster contests. We ran chainsaw workshops with a fellow named Rick Lambert. We'd work with our local media: the Simcoe Reformer and the Port Dover Maple Leaf, and Simcoe radio, with Richard Walker.

It was a wonderful group of dedicated, very knowledgeable farmers. We'd sit around the table with people like Hertha Totzke, representing apples; Annie Zaluski, a

strawberry grower; Robin Opersko, vegetables; Martin Splinter, representing dairy; and Steve O'Dwyer, wheat and cash crops.

At one of the sessions I attended, the speaker was a cattleman, a beef farmer, named Ken Kelly. He talked about stress that evening. Back in the early 1980s, this was when my partner was putting up a hog barn, and he had to borrow money at 19%, 20%, 21%. It was bad weather back then; I know that from plowing.

Ken Kelly—tough times; bad prices—had to lay off his hired man. He was working day and night. He thought he had so many problems. Then he walked into a power take-off—540 RPM—and he lost his arm. He explained to us that if you think you've got a lot of problems in farming and then you walk into a PTO and lose your arm, that puts everything in perspective.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm honoured to rise today in this House to speak on behalf of the Ontario NDP caucus and our leader, Andrea Horwath, to recognize March 21 as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

In Ontario, we join our voices with those around the world to recognize the ongoing struggles faced by racialized Ontarians. We stand with them and acknowledge their experiences while we work towards our common goal: the elimination of racial discrimination.

Ontario has the most culturally diverse population in Canada. By 2017, close to one third of Ontario's population will be made up of peoples of colour and first peoples. This is something we should be immensely proud of.

But there are still many challenges being faced in these communities. While it may be easy to look at racially charged events in the United States and think how lucky we are that things are better in Ontario, we cannot ignore these challenges here at home. Racialized communities are overrepresented when it comes to issues of income inequality, unemployment and precarious employment.

We, as a province, must take strong actions to address inequalities, to fully make the diversity of our province work for us. As long as we keep kicking poverty goals down the road, we will never achieve equality. As long as we fail to address precarious employment, all of this will be just empty talk.

We have 1,200 unsolved cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women, dating back to 1980. Aboriginal women are seven times more likely to be murdered than non-aboriginal women in Canada. The Ontario NDP is proud to join with Tom Mulcair and Canada's NDP to call for a national inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women.

In 1992, Stephen Lewis created a report on racism in Ontario that documented pervasive racism in Ontario.

More recent reports by the Ontario Human Rights Commission show that this is still true today.

The Ontario NDP join our voices with organizations like the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians and many others in calling on the Premier for the reinstatement of an anti-racism directorate that would report directly to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

While today we in this House talk about this issue, words are not enough. Far too many Ontarians systematically have racism in their daily lives and experience racism.

Rosemary Brown, the first black woman to sit in a provincial Legislature and a New Democrat, said, "We must open the doors and we must see to it they remain open, so that others can pass through"—doors to housing, to economic justice, to access to education, to good jobs, to equity of opportunity.

It is vital that we continue to celebrate the work of those who demonstrate outstanding leadership in eliminating racial discrimination. In Ontario, we have the Lincoln M. Alexander Award, which was first awarded in 1993 under a New Democratic government. The late Honourable Lincoln M. Alexander was the 24th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, serving from 1985 to 1991. He was the first member of a minority group to serve as Lieutenant Governor in any province. He spent a lifetime breaking down barriers and opening those doors.

We in this House have the power and the responsibility to take action.

FARM SAFETY

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I rise on behalf of our caucus to say a few words with regard to the initiatives of farm safety. We forget that 19 people last year, who worked mostly on family farms, were killed doing the work that they do every day.

The work of a farmer is pretty hands-on. When it's nice out, you've got to be out there. You've got to be working when the sun is shining. You've either got to plant the crop or you've got to pull it, which means you've got to work long hours. Often that leads to fatigue and—who knows—possibly to a lack of attention at times that may lead to an accident.

Most of those accidents, we know, are as a result of interaction with farm equipment, especially tractors. I've only got a few seconds, and I hope you will indulge me. Our good friend Mr. Vanthof, the agricultural critic for our party: His dad died in front of him as the result of a farm accident having to do with a tractor.

I think we all understand to what degree we have a responsibility to make sure that we do everything we can to try to make our farms as safe as possible, and those who work on those farms as safe as possible, and that we take safety seriously—in the way that we are now, but even accelerate it so that next year it's not 19 lives that are lost; hopefully, it's zero.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

PETITIONS

1540

FISH AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Mr. Norm Miller: I have petitions in support of the Almaguin Fish Improvement Association's stocking efforts in Lake Cecebe and Ahmic Lake. They read:

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry contests the Almaguin Fish Improvement Association's (AFIA) efforts to responsibly support native pickerel populations in Lake Cecebe and Ahmic Lake;

"Whereas this volunteer effort does not rely on any government funding;

"Whereas the actions taken by the AFIA are biologically sound, and have resulted in the continual conservation of these ecosystems for nearly 30 years;

"Whereas the biological integrity of these lakes is a key to the area's economic stability through tourism, and that their viability ought to be preserved for future generations;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry take immediate action to support the Almaguin Fish Improvement Association in their efforts to stock native pickerel in Lake Cecebe and Ahmic Lake;

"That the AFIA hatchery be allowed to remain operational past 2017, so that the community may continue to tend to the well-being of these ecosystems."

Mr. Speaker, I have signed this petition and fully support it.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Percy Hatfield: "To the Legislature of Ontario:

"Whereas the community of Windsor-Essex county has one of the highest unemployment rates in Canada resulting in stressful lives and financial inadequacies for many of its residents and businesses; and

"Whereas recently the Ford Motor Company was considering Windsor, Ontario, as a potential site for a new global engine that would create 1,000 new jobs (and as many as 7,000 spinoff jobs) for our community; and

"Whereas partnership with government was critical to secure this investment from Ford; and

"Whereas the inability of Ford and ... Ontario to come to an agreement for partnership contributed to the loss of this project;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To insist that the Ontario government exhaust all available opportunities to reopen the discussions around the Ford investment in Windsor and to develop a national auto strategy and review current policy meant to attract investment in the auto sector."

I fully agree with this petition. I will affix my name and give it to page Max to take up to the Clerk.

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Toby Barrett: This is a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario titled "Stop Industrial Wind Turbines.

"Whereas there is a growing body of evidence confirming industrial wind development has serious adverse effects on host communities;

"Whereas over 135 people in Ontario have reported serious negative health effects from industrial wind development, and at least a dozen families have been bought out of their homes;

"Whereas Ontario's Green Energy Act has ended local planning control by stripping municipal councils of their rights;

"Whereas 80 municipal councils, representing two million Ontarians, called on the government to put in place a full moratorium on industrial wind development until an independent epidemiological health study is completed, proper environmental regulations and protections are put in place, and local democracy is restored;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"Immediately put a moratorium on all industrial wind proposals; fund an independent epidemiological health study to develop safe setbacks; legislate those findings; develop stringent environmental protection standards for natural areas; and require all projects to comply with regulations based on science and local planning."

I fully agree and affix my signature to these petitions.

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Michael Mantha: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario does not have a strategy on Lyme disease; and

"Whereas the Public Health Agency of Canada is developing an Action Plan on Lyme Disease; and

"Whereas Toronto Public Health says that transmission of the disease requires the tick to be attached for 24 hours, so early intervention and diagnosis is of primary importance; and

"Whereas a motion was introduced to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario encouraging the government to adopt a strategy on Lyme disease, while taking into account the impact the disease has upon individuals and families in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the government of Ontario to develop an integrated strategy on Lyme disease consistent with the action plan of the Public Health Agency of Canada, taking into account available treatments, accessibility issues and the efficacy of the currently available diagnostic mechanisms. In doing so, it should consult with representatives of the health care community and patients' groups within one year."

I agree with this petition. I present it to page Marin to bring it down to the table and the Clerks.

It's my pleasure to affix my signature and give this to page Emma.

TRESPASSING

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

"Whereas when private property is damaged it is left to property owners to repair these damages, and the costs can quickly add up to thousands of dollars. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture has asked for a minimum fine for trespassing and an increase on the maximum limit on compensation for damages;

"Whereas Sylvia Jones's private member's Bill 36, the Respecting Private Property Act, will amend the current Trespass to Property Act by creating a minimum fine of \$500 for trespassing and increasing the maximum compensation for damages to \$25,000; and

"Whereas the Respecting Private Property Act will allow property owners to be fairly compensated for destruction to their property, and will also send a message that trespassing is a serious issue by creating a minimum fine;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

"To support Sylvia Jones's private member's Bill 36, the Respecting Private Property Act, and schedule public hearings so that Bill 36 can be passed without further delay."

I agree with this and will pass it off to page Jessie.

LGBT CONVERSION THERAPY

Ms. Catherine Fife: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas in 2013 the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) removed transgender and gender non-conforming identities from the mental disorders category;

"Whereas LGBT youth face 14 times the risk of suicide compared to their heterosexual peers and 77% of trans respondents in an Ontario-based survey had seriously considered suicide with 45% having already attempted suicide;

"Whereas an Ontario study found that transgender youth aged 16-24 have a 93% lower suicide rate when they feel supported by their parents in the expression of their gender identity;

"Whereas LGBT conversion therapy seeks to prohibit gender and sexual orientation expression, has no professional standards or guidelines in how it is practised and is condemned by all major professional associations of health care providers; and

"Whereas Ontario's Ministry of Health currently funds LGBT conversion therapy through OHIP;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Ministry of Health immediately cease funding all known forms of conversion therapy."

WIND TURBINES

Mr. Toby Barrett: This is another completely different set of petitions on industrial wind turbines.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas there is a growing body of evidence confirming industrial wind development has serious adverse effects on host communities;

"Whereas there are over 300 homes in the area of the proposed UDI Port Ryerse Wind Farm;

"Whereas a precedent has been set by other counties in Ontario for bylaws of increased setbacks of 1,200 to 2,000 metres for the erection of wind turbines in populated areas;

"Whereas property values are decreased by proximity to wind turbines;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to reinstate municipal powers to allow Norfolk county to reassess and increase setbacks to 2,000 metres in populated areas, to honour a moratorium on construction until these bylaw adjustments are met, and to reimburse lost property values in this affected community."

I also agree with these petitions and affix my signature.

FIRST RESPONDERS

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas emergency response workers (paramedics, police officers, and firefighters) confront traumatic events on a nearly daily basis to provide safety to the public; and

"Whereas many emergency response workers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of their work; and

"Whereas Bill 2 'An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder' sets out that if an emergency response worker suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, the disorder is presumed to be an occupational disease that occurred due to their employment as an emergency response worker, unless the contrary is shown;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to unanimously endorse and quickly pass Bill 2 'An Act to amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997 with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder'."

I sign this petition and pass it to page Marin to deliver.

HOSPICE FUNDING

Mr. Jim Wilson: "Whereas there is a discrepancy between how hospices are funded in Ontario; and

"Whereas Matthews House Hospice is the lowest-funded hospice in the Central Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) and among the lowest-funded in the province, even though it serves as many clients or more than other hospices that receive greater provincial support; and

"Whereas Matthews House has been told by the Central LHIN that LHINs do not fund residential hospice operational costs and yet hospices in other LHINs, including Barrie, Huntsville, Richmond Hill, Owen Sound and now Collingwood, all receive operational funding from the province; and

"Whereas in February 2010 Matthews House Hospice was promised a solution to its underfunding by the Central LHIN which has never materialized;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Wynne government immediately develop a comprehensive strategy to deal with hospice funding to ensure that people in south Simcoe and all Ontarians receive equal access to end-of-life care."

I appreciate and agree with this petition and will sign it.

1550

ONTARIO DISABILITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Miss Monique Taylor: I have a petition to save the ODSP Work-Related Benefit.

"Whereas the \$100 ODSP Work-Related Benefit provides a critically important source of funds to people with disabilities on ODSP who work, giving them the ability to pay for much-needed, ongoing work-related expenses such as transportation, clothing, food, personal care and hygiene items, and child care; and

"Whereas the Ministry of Community and Social Services plans to eliminate the Work-Related Benefit as part of a restructuring of OW and ODSP employment benefits, and has said that ongoing work-related expenses will not be covered by its new restructured Employment-Related Benefit; and

"Whereas eliminating the Work-Related Benefit will take approximately \$36 million annually out of the pockets of people with disabilities on ODSP who work; and

"Whereas a survey conducted by the ODSP Action Coalition between December 2014 and February 2015 shows that 18% of respondents who currently receive the Work-Related Benefit fear having to quit their jobs as a result of the loss of this important source of funds; 12.5% fear having to reduce the amount of money they spend on food, or rely on food banks; and 10% fear losing the ability to travel, due to the cost of transportation; and

"Whereas people receiving ODSP already struggle to get by, and incomes on ODSP provide them with little or no ability to cover these costs from regular benefits; and

"Whereas undermining employment among ODSP recipients would run directly counter to the ministry's

goal of increasing employment and the provincial government's poverty reduction goal of increasing income security;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to stop the provincial government's plan to eliminate the ODSP Work-Related Benefit."

I couldn't agree with this more. I have affixed my name to it, and I will give it to page Danielle to bring to the Clerk.

WATER FLUORIDATION

Ms. Indira Naidoo-Harris: I have with me a petition to the Ontario Legislative Assembly entitled "Fluoridate All Ontario Drinking Water.

"Whereas fluoride is a mineral that exists naturally in virtually all water supplies, even the ocean; and

"Whereas scientific studies conducted during the past 70 years have consistently shown that the fluoridation of community water supplies is a safe and effective means of preventing dental decay, and is a public health measure endorsed by more than 90 national and international health organizations; and

"Whereas dental decay is the second-most frequent condition suffered by children, and is one of the leading causes of absences from school; and

"Whereas Health Canada has determined that the optimal concentration of fluoride in municipal drinking water for dental health is 0.7 mg/L, providing optimal dental health benefits, and well below the maximum acceptable concentrations; and

"Whereas the decision to add fluoride to municipal drinking water is a patchwork of individual choices across Ontario, with municipal councils often vulnerable to the influence of misinformation, and studies of questionable or no scientific merit;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the ministries of the government of Ontario adopt the number one recommendation made by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health in a 2012 report on oral health in Ontario, and amend all applicable legislation and regulations to make the fluoridation of municipal drinking water mandatory in all municipal water systems across the province of Ontario."

I am affixing my signature to this petition and will hand it to page Caleb.

OPPOSITION DAY

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms. Catherine Fife: I move opposition day number 2.

Whereas the 2014 Liberal budget:

—cuts 6% out of nearly every ministry;

—cuts health care and fires nurses;

—cuts education and closes schools;

- cuts transportation and closes bus stations across the north;

- cuts affordable housing and slashes \$86 million out of Toronto's social housing programs;

- privatizes public hydro companies and sells off our public assets;

- opens new corporate tax loopholes that don't create jobs but help wealthy companies buy luxury sports tickets;

- fails to address tax fairness or consider any modest changes to corporate tax rates;

- makes life more expensive for families by letting hydro bills and gas prices rise;

- will mean firing 100,000 people, according to the Liberals' own hand-picked economist, Don Drummond; and

- news agencies have said that the Liberal budget will mean the "deepest cuts since Harris";

Therefore, it is the opinion of this House that the 2015 budget should stop cutting services, privatizing and selling off assets, putting wealthy corporations ahead of people, and, instead of continuing the Liberal austerity program, explore rolling back corporate giveaways while maintaining a competitive combined corporate tax rate, create jobs, invest in services and make life more affordable for the 13 million Ontarians who make our province work.

I move this motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Kitchener–Waterloo, Ms. Fife, has moved opposition day motion number 2. Ms. Fife.

Ms. Catherine Fife: I rise today on behalf of the Ontario NDP caucus, and the Ontarians we proudly represent, to say to this Liberal government: Enough is enough. Ontario has half a million unemployed people. The unemployment rate has been over our national average since 2006. Ontario has lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs. Working people in Ontario have seen their wages stagnate while the cost of everyday life keeps climbing.

There are strikes on our campuses and nurses walking picket lines. There are four OPP investigations into this Liberal government's corruption. The government has wasted billions upon billions of dollars, and now the government is going to tell Ontarians—middle-class and struggling Ontarians—that they need to tighten their belts a little bit more once again. Enough is enough.

In the last election, the Conservative Party to my right proudly proclaimed that they planned to cut 100,000 jobs from all across this province. As it turns out, Mr. Speaker, they weren't the ones with such a plan. While the Liberals were decrying this Conservative plan, it turns out it was actually a Liberal plan, their plan, too. Don Drummond, this Liberal government's hand-picked banker/cutting expert, said on TVO's *The Agenda* that in order to meet their projections, the Liberals would have to cut at least 100,000 jobs.

Now, they don't want to talk about this, but it is clear that they aren't being up front with the people of Ontario. One hundred thousand jobs—these aren't McJobs; they

are good, well-paying middle-class jobs. One hundred thousand jobs across Ontario's 107 ridings works out to 935 jobs in each riding. So for the people watching at home, including my mom, think about your community. Now imagine it with nearly 1,000 of your neighbours out of work.

Ontarians sent a strong message against the Conservative and Liberal plan, but this arrogant government, as usual, is not listening. The people of Ontario made it clear in the last election: They rejected a Conservative austerity agenda. But rather than recognize that mandate, this Liberal government has pushed forward with one of the most aggressive austerity agendas this province has ever seen.

It is said that Liberals like to campaign from the left but that when they get into power they rule from the right, and we are seeing this in action. If this is big-L Liberalism in Ontario, then who needs a Conservative Party? That's the outstanding question here today. We are watching Tim Hudak's dream realized by Kathleen Wynne.

New Democrats rejected the last Liberal budget, and we continue to fight it each and every day. When it was first introduced, we called it out for what it was: an austerity budget focused on massive cuts and privatization. This does nothing to improve the lives of Ontarians. We were right, and now Ontarians are seeing the results.

The last budget pushed cuts of 6% out of nearly every ministry. It's in your own budget; it's on page 244. Now the public services that Ontarians rely on are threatened, and we are about to lose tens of thousands of good-paying middle-class jobs.

The last budget pushed cuts to health care. Now we have ERs and obstetric wards closing, we are losing hospital beds in wards all across the province, and we have nurses either getting fired or out on the picket line. Many of us on this side of the House have walked those picket lines with the nurses.

The last budget pushed half a billion dollars' worth of cuts to education. Now we see school closures in cities and towns and hamlets all across the province. There are closures across Ontario, and here in Toronto some one in five schools are slated to close in some of Toronto's most struggling neighbourhoods.

The last budget cut child care spaces in 18 communities in Ontario. Now we have massive wait-lists and shortages of affordable child care.

1600

The last budget pushed cuts to transportation infrastructure across the north, where the Liberals have already done so much damage. The north has largely been ignored by this government for too long. Apparently, not satisfied with selling off the ONTC for a loss of nearly \$1 billion, we see closures of more bus stations across the north.

The last budget set the stage for massive privatization and the selloff of our public assets. Now we have the Clark panel to give the Premier political cover to privatize hydro distribution and delivery and to hold a fire sale

with Ontario's public assets in a desperate attempt to scrounge together some money.

The last budget opened \$2.5 billion in new corporate tax giveaways that not only do nothing to create jobs but merely help wealthy companies wine and dine their clients. The last budget cut affordable housing and slashed \$86 million out of Toronto's social housing programs.

It did all of these things, but nowhere in that budget did this Liberal government address tax fairness or consider even rolling back corporate tax giveaways. Nowhere in that budget did this Liberal government address the rising costs of living for middle-class and struggling families. Nowhere did this Liberal government address the rise of precarious work and the fact that Ontario has some of the highest economic inequality in the country. Nowhere did this Liberal government do anything to address the \$8 billion it wasted on P3 giveaways to wealthy construction consortia.

If that was the most progressive budget in Ontario's history, then I can think of no better reason for the people of Ontario to elect a New Democratic government.

This is the austerity budget that New Democrats have been speaking out against. We didn't get a chance to vote against it, because you did what you did. Ontarians are speaking out too. They're living this budget, the pain of this budget, each and every day, and they see it for what it is: cuts, slash, burn. The people of this province did not vote for that. Sadly, the worst is still to come. News agencies have said that the 2015 Liberal budget will mean the deepest cuts since Mike Harris.

We know the Liberals are going to make it look like they are finally getting tough on the deficit. Well, you see, Speaker, the Liberals have a bit of a perception problem. They are worried, after 12 years of scandals and misguided priorities and incompetent management, that, shockingly, Ontarians don't see them as being strong on the economy—imagine. So now they are going to try and scramble to balance the books, and they are going to do it on the backs of the most vulnerable and the middle class of this province.

All signs point to a budget that continues down a path that has been failing Ontarians. The Liberals will introduce deeper cuts to health care, education and public services that Ontarians rely on. The Liberals will try to sell our public assets. They will offer more no-strings-attached corporate tax breaks to the wealthiest corporations. They will shift more good-paying jobs from the public sector to Walmart. Pretty soon, Mr. Speaker, you may see two-fours of Coors Light in a Walmart close to you. That's how desperate this government is.

They will continue to increase fees on health care services, public services and transit. They will continue to favour their Liberal friends and Liberal insiders. They will continue down a reckless path to privatize Ontario's hydro system.

I've heard from people—Conservatives, Liberals, New Democrats, and everyday citizens—and they all know, intuitively and realistically, that it is a bad idea to

privatize our hydro system. Mike Harris and Ernie Eves eventually realized that selling off our electricity system was a step too far. They had that kind of insight. Dalton McGuinty, just four short years ago—incredible, isn't it? Just four short years ago, he grudgingly decided that it was a bad idea.

The Globe and Mail said, "Selling off prized electricity assets to pay for transit projects smacked more of a cash grab than a considered approach to maximizing value and making sound energy policy."

The Financial Post said, "Premier Wynne will discover that there is no juice to be squeezed from Hydro One. Any attempt will necessarily hit Ontario electricity consumers and taxpayers."

People are worried because they know that selling our public electricity system will only lead to even higher electricity bills, with less oversight. Here are just a few examples of the emails that I've received, and I'm sure all of us in this House have received similar ones.

Jim from Thornhill rightly points out that "this privatization proposal was not on the election ballot. The Wynne government has no mandate to proceed with such asset sales, unless it has the approval of the voters. Selling off hydro was not in your platform."

Robert calls the plan "incredibly short-sighted and stupid."

Nick from Brampton correctly writes, "Selling Hydro One or any part of it will raise already high electricity prices, which many struggle to pay."

Ontarians already pay the highest electricity bills in Canada. Ontarians have suffered a 300% rise in their electricity bills since the Liberals took office, Mr. Speaker. Ontarians will see their bills rise 42% over the next five years. The Liberal response to this is not to address the problem, but rather to give away our hydro system for corporate profit.

We know how this story ends: even higher bills, less oversight, another Liberal boondoggle waiting to happen. The people of Ontario—we all know that this is a bad idea; we all read the emails and the letters every day—are worried. People in this province are genuinely and sincerely worried about this short-sighted move.

You don't sell your future, but that is exactly what this government is planning to do. You can't cut or sell your way to prosperity, it has been proven in other jurisdictions; it doesn't work.

Ontario's New Democrats are calling on this Liberal government to stop the cuts to health care, public services, and rein in public sector CEO salaries. Stop cutting education, stop closing schools, and consider following the example of the Ontario NDP "Open Schools" plan, which would create more child care spaces in our under-used schools. Close corporate tax loopholes, and conduct a thorough assessment of rolling back the combined corporate tax rate to a competitive level. Stop the current P3s giveaway to wealthy corporations, and focus on a public and transparent procurement process. This province will never recover economically if you continue to waste billions of dollars on P3s.

The process going forward with infrastructure should allow the Financial Accountability Office to determine the value for money of Ontario's infrastructure projects. Put the Financial Accountability Officer to work. Prove all the rhetoric that you've been giving this House. Abandon the short-sighted fire sale of Ontario's public assets and get a handle on the skyrocketing cost of hydro, and make life more affordable for Ontarians. It is possible to do, Mr. Speaker.

This is about priorities. This motion in this House today is about priorities. Our job is to put the priorities of Ontarians first; our job is to make the quality of life for Ontarians, the people that we serve, better. The Ontario NDP is firmly committed to that job and to these priorities, and I encourage this House to follow our lead and adopt this motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Stop the clock, please. I beg to inform the House that, pursuant to standing order 98(c), a change has been made to the order of precedence on the ballot list for private members' public business such that Mr. Fraser assumes ballot item number 44 and Mr. Balkissoon assumes ballot item number 46.

Further debate.

Ms. Eleanor McMahon: It's a pleasure for me to have the opportunity this afternoon to stand in the House, further to the member opposite, and speak about our government's responsible plan to balance the budget by 2017-18, while still making important investments in the areas that matter the most.

Speaker, we were elected on an agenda of building Ontario up, and in doing so investing in people and in infrastructure. I am not only proud to have run on this agenda; I am proud to serve as part of a government whose balanced approach to investment has won the hearts and minds of Ontarians.

I'll start by citing some examples. Hospital funding has increased 50% since 2003, from \$11.3 billion to \$17 billion this year. In fact, Infrastructure Ontario is working with Joseph Brant Hospital, in my riding of Burlington, to develop our new state-of-the-art facility as part of our government's commitment to infrastructure renewal.

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When the project is complete, it will add 144 single-patient rooms, an increase of 70% in single-patient rooms across the hospital—patient rooms with comforts and conveniences that include three-piece washrooms and many of the comforts of home—and nine new state-of-the-art operating rooms. A new intensive care unit will be built, along with an expanded cancer clinic. All of this is part of our plan to build Ontario up. Why? Because our hospital has not had an investment since 1971. I think all of us would agree that that is long overdue.

Recent Ontario government investment in local mental health and addictions organizations is also key to building Ontarians up. This will enhance access and care for Burlington residents who are experiencing mental health and addictions challenges. Why do I know this? Because I have many people coming into my office with

these kinds of issues, and they're talking to me about the need to invest in these kinds of programs for their children and their families.

Our LHIN, the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network, has been provided with \$2 million in funding for this year to invest in local and regional high-priority services across the LHIN geography. If you'll allow me, Speaker, I'm going to elucidate on a few of those.

LHIN-wide services that will benefit citizens in Burlington include:

- \$81,000 for the LHIN-wide expansion of existing evidence-informed mental health promotion training for families, caregivers and other non-health professionals;

- \$131,000 for the implementation of a LHIN-wide mobile outreach team that will provide early intervention, advocacy and support for youths aged 17 to 24 and their families, as well as improvements in terms of system navigation for those people who need it most;

- \$176,000 to enable capacity-building for concurrent disorders—a huge issue—including funding for a LHIN-wide concurrent disorders project implementation coordinator; and

- over \$3,000 to train health care professionals across the region in areas such as collaborative assessment and management of suicidality—unfortunately a growing issue right across our province.

The next phase of Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy includes a massive \$138 million over three years for community agencies to support improvements to mental health and addictions services throughout our LHINs across Ontario.

Supporting community mental health and addictions as I've just outlined is part of Ontario's Patients First: Action Plan for Health Care. It is also part of our government's four-part plan to build Ontario up by investing in people's talents and skills, building new public infrastructure like roads and transit, creating a dynamic and supportive environment where business thrives, and building a secure savings plan so everyone can afford to retire.

These are a few concrete examples of how the investments made by our government in the last budget are positively impacting the lives of Ontarians in very meaningful ways.

We're also committed to strengthening Ontario's economy and creating jobs. In fact, it was recently announced that we have entered into a partnership with Toyota Canada to expand its Elmira manufacturing facility and create and sustain over 450 jobs. In February, General Motors Canada announced a \$560-million investment in their Ingersoll facility, safeguarding over 3,000 positions. Again, in February, Ford announced that its luxury GT will be built in the Markham area. Chrysler announced a \$2-billion investment in their Chrysler Town & Country van assembly plant in Windsor. I had the pleasure of working at the minivan assembly plant in Windsor, Ontario, when I was a youngster. Linamar, in partnership with our government, is investing over half a

billion dollars in their Guelph operations, creating 1,200 new jobs and safeguarding over 6,700 existing positions.

Just a few weeks ago, closer to home for me, Speaker, Ford announced a \$400-million investment in their Oakville facility—great news for our community, for Halton region, and a huge mark of confidence in our province. In fact, virtually every chief economist in Canada, and the Conference Board of Canada to boot, has said that Ontario will lead the country in economic growth this year, and we are the leading province in terms of foreign direct investment as well.

Honda, in partnership with our government, is investing over \$857 million in its Alliston facility.

Our government has been the most supportive government to the auto sector in Ontario's history, which underscores our commitment and determination in growing Ontario's economy and creating good-paying and long-term employment. It speaks to our agenda of building Ontario up and how residents in communities like mine in Burlington will benefit from the tertiary impacts of these critical investments in our economy and, in particular, our manufacturing sector.

This is in stark contrast to what we would see in this province if the member opposite and her colleagues in the third party had their way. In fact, as we all know, they voted against our budget, which included many of the things they now demand, including an Ontario Retirement Pension Plan which will, among other things, serve to ensure that we do not have a generation of Ontarians retiring in poverty. No one wants that. They talk of the dangers of selling government assets, etc., and they repeatedly bring up our government's supposed cuts to health care and education, but in their own platform they laid out their plan to reduce spending in these areas by \$2.2 billion by 2017-18.

In short, our government clearly holds the best interests of Ontarians as our number one priority, as my examples have shown. We are dedicated to balancing the budget by 2017-18. That is our plan for the benefit of future generations. We're investing in crucial infrastructure—\$130 billion over the next decade—to ensure that Ontario is able to reach its full potential. We will continue to invest in health care, education and transportation because they matter to our communities, to Ontarians and to us.

In short, our government is committed to responsible investment in Ontario in all aspects to make it the best place that it can be.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Jim Wilson: The New Democrat motion that we're debating today contains a number of interesting points dealing with the deficiencies contained within the Liberal 2014 budget, last year's budget. Some of these points we even agree with. For example, we agree that the budget cut health care and continues to fire nurses on a daily basis, reversing a pledge the Premier made to the people of Ontario in the 2014 election. She wasn't going to fire anybody. We agree that the budget cut education

and closed schools, again reversing a pledge the Premier made to the people of Ontario in the 2014 election. And we agree that the budget makes life more expensive for families by letting hydro bills and gas prices rise, again reversing a pledge the Premier made to the people of Ontario in the 2014 election.

However, the solutions that Progressive Conservatives would propose to address these problems are very different from those of our NDP colleagues to my left. The type of policies the NDP would like to put in place are not ones we would agree with, and therefore we cannot support this motion.

But given these examples of how the Premier reversed herself just mere weeks after the June election, I'm very concerned with what might be in the Liberals' upcoming budget. How many more reversals to pledges will there be? And that's putting it politely, Mr. Speaker. How many more additional burdens will be put on the people of Ontario and on Ontario families? And how many more people will be fired as a result of this government's policies and the debt they continue to rack up?

The provincial debt has been rising because of out-of-control government spending. The amount of money that has to be paid in debt-carrying costs is having an impact on services that people need. Interest on the debt is the third-largest expenditure for this government, after health care and education. At \$10.6 billion currently, that works out to \$29 million each and every day—\$29 million each and every day that goes to pay interest and is lost to other expenditures that would benefit people. Servicing the debt currently takes up 9.1% of provincial revenues, and it's estimated to grow by a further \$400 million this year. These figures are clearly astonishing and unacceptable.

Week after week, we hear examples of firings because the government doesn't have the money to fund the people needed in important areas of public service: front-line health care and education, to name two big areas—people such as the special-education teachers in Toronto who will be let go, meaning vulnerable children's education will be affected. Hospital staff at the children's hospital in Ottawa, CHEO, are losing their jobs because funding for them is no longer available. Just think how many special-education teachers could be funded if this \$29 million a day that goes to interest was available to help those children. Just think how many health care staff could be funded, including the 42 nurses in Sudbury who are about to be fired, if this \$29 million a day was available.

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This government spends and spends and spends. This spending increases the debt. More money must go to carry the cost of that debt, so money needed for real people to provide real services disappears. The Provincial Auditor, in her last report, indicated that there's a real problem because of our debt and our debt servicing costs; that important programs are being crowded out, as she put it. It's the first time that we've seen that from a Provincial Auditor, where she's worried enough to say that you're not going to have money for health care and

education and other important priorities because of your debt and your debt servicing costs. It's the people of Ontario who suffer. The government needs to get its fiscal house in order and stop making the people of Ontario carry the burden of its overspending and lack of financial control.

I'll conclude, Mr. Speaker, by saying that over the next few days the Ontario PC caucus will be raising a number of issues that we think must be key elements in the government's upcoming budget. On budget day, we'll be looking at how its contents measure up to the criteria we have set. We will be basing our consideration of the budget on how the government is planning to deal with the very important issues we will be raising.

Mr. Speaker, the Ontario PC caucus believes the Liberal government can do much better than it did in its 2014 budget, and we would like to see if it will do better.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I'd like to thank the leader of the official opposition, the member from Simcoe—Grey.

Further debate.

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, budgets are written every year, and we deal with budgets. I believe in the five Ps: Prior planning prevents poor performance. If you look at that significant comment, you would look at all the waste that we have seen in the last three or four years. It started with eHealth, Ornge, gas plants, MaRS.

The new one that's going to cost this province a fortune—and I've got lots of details that will be coming forward—is the Pan Am Games. There's no way that they're going to balance the budget in 2017-18. It's impossible. Security for the games started off at \$113 million, and then about a year later it went to \$238 million. I found out today that they haven't even signed agreements with the regional police departments: Peel, Halton, Hamilton, Niagara. Our police chief just cancelled all leave and holidays for our police department in Hamilton, which will involve, I'm sure, lots of overtime. The OPP announced today that they're going to cancel holidays but there will be no more money involved in that. I can't believe that for a minute. This \$238 million that they're sticking by now, from the original \$113 million—trust me; I wouldn't be surprised if that's up another \$100 million, minimum. And now they're going to balance a budget.

Speaker, there are so many other things going on that are going to cost this government a fortune. They talk about road preparations, and they talk about infrastructure. They're going to invest in all these projects throughout Ontario. That's great, but I know from my days on city council, and I'm sure other members in here know, that costs escalate. They put in a bid, they get the bid, and then halfway through the bid they tell you, "If you don't give us another \$100 million, we'll go under because I can't pay my subcontractors; I can't finish the project." I don't know how many times cities got saddled with either not good workmanship because they did it quickly and couldn't afford to finish it properly, or secondly, they underbid and couldn't afford to finish it. A lot of the

companies go under because they don't have the resources to back up what they say they're going to do. These are just some of the things that they don't take into consideration when they form a budget.

Let's talk about contingency funds for the things that may happen as we go along in the next two years. Have they got any? I don't know. Contingency funds are there to support overpayments, overruns, "Lightning struck today and we didn't know it"—things like that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Liberals lied.

Mr. Paul Miller: And maybe another scandal might get thrown in just for a bonus.

The bottom line, Speaker, is that there's no possible way that they're going to come in under budget on the Pan Am Games. There's no possible way that they're going to meet their budget deadline of 2017-18—because these are just some of the things that I can touch on in the couple of minutes that I've got. It's absolutely unconscionable for them to stand up here every day and say, "Folks, everything's under control. Trust us. Look at our record." We're I don't know how many billions—what could I have done with just the eHealth, Ornge, gas plants and MaRS, which at this point is closing in on \$2 billion? What could I have done with \$2 billion in Hamilton?

I'll tell you, that stadium would be finished on time, if it was in Canadian hands. That's number one. Number two: I'd have the best road system in Ontario; I'd fill every pothole in Hamilton. Every kid in my schools would go to school with a full stomach instead of half-full. I wouldn't have single moms coming into my office with nowhere to go with two kids in tow.

What do they cut? They cut the winter clothing allowance for kids. What is that? But they can blow a billion dollars rebuilding a gas plant that was already built because the people didn't want it there in the first place. They built it anyway, in spite of what the people wanted, and then they say to the people, "Okay, we'll tear it down because we don't want to lose our four seats." Give me a break.

The waste in this building since I've been here is phenomenal. It's astronomical. If people ever got a grasp on how much is wasted here day in and day out, millions and millions of dollars—what could I do with that money in Hamilton? I could help a heck of a lot of people.

So all I can say is this: Good luck. First of all, you're not going to be on budget. Secondly, you're going to have overruns on this budget you are proposing. And you are cutting, because I know first-hand, through very close people to my family, that there are people being laid off in nursing, being laid off in London, the Deputy Premier's own hometown. They are laying off and cutting back there and all over Ontario.

So don't tell me everything's in good hands with Allstate, because I've got a real problem with that. I've got a feeling there are going to be a lot more surprises cropping up in the next two or three years. I'll be sitting here, and if you see a little smirk on my face, you'll know what I'm thinking.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Talk about having a smirk on your face, Mr. Speaker, I've got to tell you, I didn't play a lot of baseball growing up. I played a little softball in high school, but I never had the pleasure of playing T-ball when I was a very young child, and you know what T-ball is all about. T-ball is when you put the ball on the stick and you make it really easy to just lob one out of the park. This is what this looks like to me, Mr. Speaker: a little game of T-ball that the leader of the third party has brought forward for us today.

If I were to describe this motion in one simple world, it would be "masochistic." The reality is, this is attacking a budget that we ran on in an election in June. June 12, the people spoke. They overwhelmingly, in a majority government, supported the direction of this government.

Mr. Speaker, understand: We ran on this budget. I went door to door, often with the budget in my hand, and showed them where we were doing such incredibly progressive things.

I know that during the lead-up to writing that budget, we travelled, the committee, all across the province to talk to people in Ontario about these great progressive opportunities to keep the government—the minority government at the time—from falling. I know that the previous member from Beaches–East York was on that committee. He went to all these communities in Ontario and said, "What would you like to see in this budget?" The people responded, "We'd like to see this; we'd like to see that." So much of that went into this budget. Yet the members of the third party voted it down, forcing what I've often said in the House was an unnecessary election.

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: But it's a good thing they did.

Mr. Arthur Potts: But it's a good thing they did—thank you, Lou—because I wouldn't have had the pleasure to be here with my members on this side of the House.

But the reality is, it was only nine months ago, and yet the leader of the third party is bringing forward this motion.

I went to the convention in which she received a heartfelt endorsement for her leadership. I was delighted that she could continue on in her capacity, that she was able, but I noticed a very fundamental shift during that process of that convention when speaker after speaker got up and was critical of the direction that the party took during the course of the election.

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I can think of a couple of members who were particularly upset with the direction that the third party took in that election. She had to assure the house that she would come back to her progressive, very left-wing roots in order to move forward, which we thought meant that she would be supporting the budget, a budget which she and members of the committee had helped frame, but that didn't happen. At the convention—I talked about her—she had this transformation successfully, but now she

comes back with a full-on critique of what has to be the most progressive budget in the history of the province of Ontario, under the direction of what I like to call—and did during the campaign—the new, progressive Liberal Party of Ontario.

Because that's what we are. That's why we have members from Sudbury coming from the federal NDP party over to our party: because he recognizes that we are the progressive voice in Ontario and an opportunity for him to participate in that. Let's remember what that budget did—

Miss Monique Taylor: There's no way a real New Democrat can turn into a Liberal.

Mr. Arthur Potts: It's easy enough. All you have to do is recognize where your progressive roots are, as I did.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Order.

Mr. Arthur Potts: I know the previous member for Beaches–East York had to vote against a budget that was going to put over \$200 million into the Toronto East General Hospital. I know that pained him, because this is an institution that I have supported for 20 years, and I know that he did as well. I know that he had to vote—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I appreciate the sidebars, but this isn't the place to have sidebars, so I would ask that respect be shown to the member in debate. I would ask the member to please continue, and others to show their respect. Thank you.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. Sometimes I think that what we need, if I can go back to a sports analogy, is maybe a soccer approach: a little yellow card once in a while, and then to a red card and you're out of here. I appreciate your cautioning the members opposite so I can continue my remarks.

As I was going door to door, I would ask, "What do the current member and the NDP have against giving raises to personal support workers?" We are shifting the role of health care out of hospitals and into communities, using personal support workers, using RNs, using other ways of delivering health care. We're going to have more people in the pharmacies—pharmacists—conducting initial examinations, giving shots. We're downloading—offloading—from the hospital sector.

When this motion says, irresponsibly, that we're cutting health care and firing nurses, it doesn't appreciate that we are reallocating resources where they can be used far more efficiently, far more effectively. This is absolutely important. For the NDP to come forward knowing—and we had the remarks from the member opposite about the deficit. Let's be very clear: We have about a \$25-billion-smaller deficit now than it would have otherwise been, because we have made tremendous progress. We have been repeatedly coming in lower than our deficit targets, and we are well on target to balance the budget in 2017-18, so I urge all members to vote against this motion. It just isn't in the best interests of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: It's a pleasure to join the debate today. I must say, I want to congratulate the New Democrats for bringing this motion forward. Although I won't be supporting it, because I don't agree with the way we need to get there, I want to congratulate them for bringing this issue forward.

I've always said, and I've always maintained since I arrived at this place almost nine years ago to this day, that the most exciting time to be a member of the Legislature is the lead-up to the budget, the budget and post-budget, because that is when we get to express our values and who we are as legislators, and we get to express the values and the ideas and the needs of the constituents who have sent us to Queen's Park.

For them to start this process I think is important. I believe that our leader of the official opposition expressed some of the concerns that we have that are shared. We just don't agree on how to get there and what the solutions are. With that respect, I'm not going to support the motion, but I want the New Democrats to know that I think it's important that they put this forward.

For the member from Beaches–East York, who said that this motion was masochistic, I take great exception to that. In fact, why I take great exception to that, Speaker, is because I take great pride in standing here, in speaking about the needs of Ontario, in speaking about the values that I hold and the ideals that the people of my riding expect me to express here. And for the third party to do that today I think is the appropriate response of any legislator, it is the appropriate response of any caucus, and it is the exact thing we are sent here to do.

They're talking about the cuts. Let me be very clear on the hypocrisy of this government. On the one hand, they went into an election—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I would ask the member to withdraw.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, I withdraw that. I do apologize to the member from the Garden City for that.

Here's the issue, and this is the crux of the problem: For four elections in a row, we have seen a Liberal government come to office. They put forward a platform to the people of this great province and they said, "This is what we will do."

The first time they said that they would not raise taxes. Within the first year, they brought in the health premium, a \$900 income tax, the single largest income tax increase in Ontario's history. They brought that in.

The second election came, 2007. The Liberals said, "We won't raise your taxes," and then they brought in the single largest sales tax increase in Ontario's history, the HST.

The third election happened in 2011. They said, "We're sorry, we're sorry, we're so very, very sorry," and then they brought in an eco tax, the single largest environmental tax in Ontario's history.

In 2014, when they said they won't raise taxes, they won't cut services, they won't sell hydro, they won't sell beer in convenience stores or grocery stores—they're

changing all that, and they're going to bring in what will now become the single largest environmental tax in Ontario's history, with a carbon tax. They have brought in a jet fuel tax which is making it more expensive for any Ontario traveller to travel across this province. They are also bringing a job-killing payroll tax that they've masked behind a pension plan which many people will never derive any single benefit from. That is what their next budget will be.

The history of this government is to say and do anything in order to obtain power, then retain power. That's what we've experienced, Speaker, because this is a government, through eHealth, through Ornge, through the cancelled gas plants and now, as we see sadly, a Sudbury by-election scandal, that will do anything in order to retain power. Four OPP investigations, including two into the current Premier's office in the last several months: They will do anything in order to stay in power.

That brings me to the 2014 election. I remember it quite vividly. I don't mind telling members in the gallery or those at home today that it was probably the toughest election I ever fought. I'll tell you, part of it was because of the unprecedented attacks of over 20 unions amalgamated together to spend close to \$10 million attacking our leader and our party; but secondly, it was difficult because the government said that there was effectively no deficit too big for them, and they could deal with it. They were going to meet all of their deficit reduction targets.

When my colleague from Niagara West–Glanbrook, the former leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, put forward his plan in order to get back to balance, the government of the day, which ran for re-election, effectively said that they wouldn't do those things. Now, less than a year later—less than nine months later—this government is now on track to reduce or eliminate 100,000 jobs in the public service. Don't take my word for it; ask the nurses at CHEO; ask the education workers at the Toronto District School Board; ask the PSW workers across this province. Tim Hudak told the truth, and Kathleen Wynne decided she wanted to mask the dirty little details of the debt and the deficit.

They talked about privatizing hydro as a bad thing, dating back to Dalton McGuinty's days. The current Minister of Energy over a year ago said that they would never privatize hydro. Yet they decided when they assembled people for a \$1,500-per-plate fundraiser that they were going to start to sell off hydro—but they're not doing it to pare down the size and scope of government; they're not doing it to eliminate the debt and the deficit; they're not doing it for the future of Ontarians; they're doing it so that they can have more spending power. They're basically selling off the family car in order to buy a big vacation. In their minds, that's how it works, and to Ontario families I say that's exactly what's happening.

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When we look around the province of Ontario today, we are seeing the catastrophic effects of a government that is allowing its debt and its deficit to take control of

our situation. My leader, the leader of the official opposition, today stated in this House that the third-largest spending priority of this government is servicing the debt and the deficit. That means every single dollar spent on servicing the debt and the deficit is a dollar taken away from our children in schools and our patients in hospitals. That is the direct correlation. Our leader also said today that this is a government that isn't concerned with trying to eliminate the debt and the deficit. He indicated today that it's \$29 million a day that is being wasted and diverted away from those kids. I think that is what's important here.

When the New Democrats today talk about the cuts to health care and firing nurses, that is a consequence of the government not meeting its deficit reduction targets. When the New Democrats talk about education and school closures, that is a direct response to a high debt and deficit. When they talk about affordable housing being slashed across the province, that is because of the debt and the deficit. The transportation and closing of bus stations across the north: Those are all consequences of a government that doesn't take its fiscal health seriously.

Now they're going to have to adopt the Progressive Conservative platform in 2014, a platform that they didn't campaign on, that they told us they didn't believe in, and one that I think they're only half-heartedly trying to make work. These are the real consequences.

I'm going to say, Speaker, that the Liberal reality and the Liberal campaign promise are two very different things, and that's why we're here today. I can sense the frustration, not only with my own colleagues but those of the New Democratic Party. When we were told one thing by this government and they do another, it's very frustrating, and we see the direct consequences to that.

Speaker, I started this—and I'll end soon—by talking about the views and values of the people I represent in Nepean–Carleton and how proud I am as a member from the city of Ottawa to stand here each and every day for the past nine years.

One of the people that I've drawn a great deal of inspiration and support from recently passed away, and I want to share with you a little bit about Ken Ross. I've spoken about him many times in this assembly. Ken was a great community leader from Barrhaven. He owned Ross's Independent grocery store. Whenever there was an opportunity to speak about the budget or supply or any of those big things that we talk about here at the Legislature, Ken was the first call I made. He was the chair of the business improvement area. He was involved in the Legion in which I'm involved, the Lions Club, the South Nepean Autism Centre; he was a founding director. I was one of the founders as well. He had a great deal of compassion for other people.

Ken was the exact type of person we want to see succeed in Ontario: a business owner who understands that government can't and shouldn't do it all itself. So he would bring people together in order to ensure we had wonderful services in our community. In fact, when he died, he was chairing the Barrhaven Food Cupboard,

which I'm also very much involved in. I must say, just in the last hour, to the Barrhaven Legion how proud I am of them for donating \$10,000 to that cause, and \$5,000 of that in the name of Ken Ross.

So when I close today, I must say this: Each budget I would speak to Ken, and Ken would give me his straight goods, straight talk on how it would affect businesses, how it would affect service clubs, how it would impact the people that I represent. He's not with me this year, not with any of us this year, to talk about the Ontario budget and its proposals. So I say this to my constituents: I will continue to talk to them, as I spoke with Ken and many of them previously, and I'll look forward in the next month, as Progressive Conservatives, New Democrats and Liberals look around this province, look at the real challenges that not only this province faces, but that the people who live here, the people who call Ontario home, face. We bring those to the floor of this assembly and we debate them vigorously. For no idea is a bad one in this assembly; it needs debate. For that, I want to say thanks for the opportunity to speak, thanks to the New Democrats for bringing this idea forward, and hopefully to the Liberals for a spirited debate. But on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, I'd like to say thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I was looking forward to opposition day this week, because this opposition motion is very important. It's important, Speaker, because we need to make sure that the people of Ontario hear the voice from the opposite side of this House as to why this budget is not what it appears to be. It's not the progressive budget that the Liberals claim it is. It's actually filled with austerity measures. That's what our job is here, Speaker, on this side of the House: to point those out.

I want to talk a little bit about the atmosphere in this House since I've been elected in 2011. The reason I talk about that is because, in 2011, many of us here in the New Democratic Party were elected in a minority government. The way business was conducted in this House was extremely different from what we're experiencing today in a majority government. I prefer a minority government.

Interjections.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: That's right—because it actually works like democracy is supposed to. Because we have a voice. We have a voice here in the majority government, too. We can continually push this government to do the right thing.

I'm very proud, I have to say, of the House leader we have here in this party, from Timmins–James Bay. I'm privy to being part of that House team, and I hear how he tries to negotiate, bring suggestions forward, co-operate and compromise to try to make this government listen. I wasn't on the House team in the minority government, but I can see, in a majority government, that he's doing a wonderful job to get these members, these MPPs, to pay attention to what issues Ontarians want to hear about, and how it's affecting people in our ridings.

You cannot be representative of a majority government and, surely, act the way this government has been acting—completely arrogant. I've seen the difference in behaviour; I've seen the minority government, the way they came to the table and tried to make concessions, and now in a majority government, Speaker, it's extremely different. They kind of maybe have a little cackle here and there. They don't actually believe what we're saying—but you should listen, and you should believe what we're saying because we are the voices that we represent. Whether it's a minority or majority, we're going to communicate those voices and those issues to this government, so that they can actually have a budget and produce results in Ontario that people can be happy with. People will actually be able to depend on child care spaces, on health care, on education and on infrastructure.

They're not doing that great of a job, Speaker. That's why we're here. We're here to communicate that. Honestly, Speaker, we create the environment we work in in this Legislature. I want to create that environment for this government to talk to us, listen to us, approach us, take our good suggestions—please take them—use them as your own, but we will claim them. We will claim them, Speaker.

The reason I'm talking about the atmosphere in this House is because, during the lunch break, we had the Ontario Association of Former Parliamentarians Distinguished Service Award, and the honouree at that event was Stephen Lewis—

Applause.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes. There were a lot of older parliamentarians that served in this House, and they talked about how things are so different; how people, how MPPs, how politicians, how they actually interact with each other—much different than they used to.

Speaker, I would rather have that respect here in this House, and respect the differences of our opinions. When we're giving you our opinion, it's specifically to help you understand what's going on on this side of the House. There's a difference—not just what you're telling us is actually correct. People see it differently here. For this government, as a majority government, not to actually take that seriously is very distasteful. So I just want to say that we are here in this House, we agree to disagree, but when we leave, we should have all the due respect for our colleagues.

I'm very proud to serve with each and every member in this House, but during this budget process we need to point out that this is an austerity budget. This budget is not progressive, and the people of Ontario are going to see cuts in every ministry of 6%.

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The member from Timmins—James Bay talked this morning about invasive species. The MNR—this is a fact—is being cut: 6% every year in that ministry. How can that be progressive, and how did this government not explain that to the people of Ontario in 2014? It's wrong.

I'll pass it over. I'm done my debate, Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate. The member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Well, thank you very much, Speaker. I understand the Ontario Dental Association is looking to have the rubber match, and I'm hoping that the Speaker will again be coaching the team.

I'm very happy to speak today on our government's plan for the economy and our plan to grow the province. I have read the opposition day motion, which is a whole series of assertions, none of which actually stand up to any scrutiny. As the essence of the motion itself makes fairly little sense, I thought I would just talk about what the government has actually done.

One of the things that the government has done is, of course, to be very cognizant of the need to streamline and make our services far more efficient. If one remembers back to early 2012, when Don Drummond tabled his report on the delivery of public services in the province of Ontario, we've implemented more than 80% of Don Drummond's recommendations. We're not going to implement, as a government, all of them, because there are some that go beyond what our government thought was fair and reasonable in the circumstances, but where Don Drummond has made a reasoned, sensible plea to optimize and streamline parts of the government, the government has done it, and four out of five of his recommendations have been implemented, with more still to come.

This speaks to an ability to do something that this motion doesn't. This motion says, "Let's preserve the status quo forever." That's not a progressive way to go for this province. Our province was made great by challenging the status quo and asking ourselves, "Is this the best way that we can run our province?" Very often we've said that just because we've always done it that way, that doesn't mean to say that that's the way we should continue to do this in the future.

So Ontario is saying this year that just because we have always, for example, sold wine and beer in a certain way, through the LCBO and through the Beer Store, is that the only way? Can we have a reasonable and sensible dialogue? Can we look at other alternatives? And is there another way to get a better deal for the taxpayer, ensure that we retain choice and convenience, and preserve the integrity of the system?

I think that's a discussion well worth having. I don't know what the outcome of it is—I'm sure it's something that we're going to be talking about as the province considers the budget—but I'm very, very interested in that. I was born and raised in the province of Quebec, where we have a different system. I spent some of my adult years in the province of British Columbia, where we do things differently than we do in the province of Ontario.

I'm extremely interested to know, looking at the way we do things in Ontario and comparing them to the way we do things in other parts of Canada and parts of the States—I certainly want to avoid some of the excesses in the States, where you pay as much or more for some of

the popular brands of what you're buying but the choice available isn't anywhere close to what you can find in the province of Ontario.

That's what we mean when we say "unlocking the value" of strategic provincial assets. What we're doing is saying, "Just because we've always done it that way, is that the way we should do it in perpetuity?" That's what the opposition motion is saying. They're saying, "Just keep right on doing it, because we like the way it's being done and we don't think anything should change." We respectfully disagree. We think that change is good. We think that change is something that we should approach, we should discuss. We should come up with a workable plan, which in this case is what I think the government is doing.

The province has also moved to strengthen our funding to community and developmental services. Just last year, Ontario invested an additional \$810 million over three years in our community and developmental services. Coming from Peel region, one of the ways in which we felt it over the last few years is that as a rapidly growing region we have been complaining in Peel, saying—and they've used it, Fair Share Peel—"We in Peel region, which means Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon, make up about 11% of Ontario's population. Let's look at what we're getting as our portion of the pie in some of these areas of human services," and it was far less than that. I have to commend and compliment my former colleague Linda Jeffrey, now Brampton's mayor, for her work. The two of us worked very hard on this, and in several of the areas in which we've worked, lo and behold, our share of the provincial funding in Peel region is now 11%, plus or minus only a few fractions of a decimal point.

Speaker, those are some of the key points I wanted to make in my few minutes.

I will be voting against this motion.

I think Ontario should be able to ask itself: Are we doing the best job we can? Do we have the courage to question our status quo? I think we do.

I'm looking forward to moving forward with a government that I've been proud to serve for some 11 years and which has taken this province and retained its status as a leader in Confederation, a status that we're certain to see in our economic performance in this and subsequent years.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I thank the member from Mississauga—Streetsville.

Further debate?

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's a pleasure to join the debate on the opposition day motion put forward today by the member for Kitchener—Waterloo. It's an interesting motion. I'm certain they put a lot of thought into drafting it. But at the end of the day, I won't be able to support the motion. There are just too many caveats in there for me that would make it impossible to do what should have been done years ago.

Why do we have a motion like this, and why are we dealing with such a mess in Ontario? Well, my colleague,

our leader, from Simcoe—Grey and my colleague from Nepean—Carleton spoke about it earlier. It's the failure of this government over the past almost 12 years in dealing with the fiscal circumstances that they've created. Why do we have a situation where we're cutting core services here in the province of Ontario? Because the government didn't do their job in managing their fiscal affairs when they should have and could have and now their back is against the wall. Their back is against the wall, because all the people out there are saying, "Ontario's finances are precarious." The debt-rating agencies are saying, "You're going down. You've gone down to A-minus with a warning." Why? Because they didn't do the job when they should have.

If they had paid some proper attention to managing Ontario's debt and deficit in a more timely fashion, we wouldn't be in the situation we are in today: a \$12.5-billion deficit in an economy that should be doing so much better, but it's not. That is the challenge that this government has. I don't envy them, but I certainly don't have sympathy for them because the chickens are coming home to roost and they're the ones who bred the chickens.

The debt servicing costs in Ontario are the third-largest item in the budget following the expenditures on health care and education—almost \$11 billion. If that number wasn't there, we'd have \$11 billion to spend on the things that Ontarians need and deserve. Certainly, I say "deserve" because the way this government has picked their pockets over the past 12 years and not delivered the services they have asked for—clearly, the people have paid the bill and the government has not delivered. That could be the mantra of this government: "You pay the bills. We'll fail to deliver." It could be their slogan because we could repeat that so many times.

Yet, in the past, they were elected on platforms that really didn't speak to what the plan was. "I will not raise your taxes." Do you remember that guy? He stood in front of the television cameras and said, "I will not raise your taxes." Do you remember who that was?

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Mr. Todd Smith: I remember.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: And he signed the pledge.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He signed the pledge in front of the cameras. That was Dalton McGuinty, the former Premier of Ontario. He proceeded with the largest tax increase in Ontario's history—the largest tax increase in Ontario's history.

That was the first time the people got duped by the duplicitous nature of this government. Then, of course, in 2007, they never said a word about the HST, how they took that tax and put it on so many more items, including gasoline—gasoline, Mr. Speaker, which is so important to the people in my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, where we have to drive pretty well everywhere. There are no subways. There is very little public transportation. People pay far more than their fair share of gas taxes to begin with, which does not go back to them. Then on top of that, Dalton McGuinty brought in the

HST and added that on to gasoline, which hurt people even more.

Throughout their almost 12 years now, we have seen hydro rates go up and up and up, from a time when we were very competitive and had one of the lower rates across the country at 4.3 cents a kilowatt hour, to now when it's over 14 cents a kilowatt hour at peak. Speaker, there are so many people in this province who simply can't afford to pay their hydro bills. They have to make a choice: Are they going to pay their rent, or are they going to pay their electricity bill? Are they going to pay their taxes, or are they going to pay their electricity bill?

In areas like where I come from, Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, a lot of people built their homes in the 1970s, when everybody was being told, “Go electric. Heat your home electrically. It's going to be the best bargain out there. It will be the cheapest, the most efficient. You won't have to worry about building all this duct work. You won't have a furnace. You won't have anything that has a fire box in your home.” What happened? Well, then, Dalton McGuinty came along. Now to heat those homes in the wintertime—and we've had pretty harsh winters; the last couple of them have been among the harshest in history. The cost of heating those homes for most people—many seniors who are on fixed incomes are paying more for a hydro bill than they're getting in old age pension.

Now the government is talking about selling Hydro One. They're throwing all kinds of trial balloons out there to see which ones are going to float and which ones are going to get pinpricked and bust. They're not giving us many of the details.

I'll tell you one thing they'd better keep in mind. It is the electricity consumer who has paid for Hydro One. It is not the government's right to simply take that asset and say, “We're going to build subways with the sale of that asset.” That belongs to the people who paid their hydro bills faithfully all those years and have been taking it on the chin from this government.

If you're going to sell that asset, first of all, it has to be thoroughly reviewed by the Financial Accountability Officer. It has to be vetted and reviewed by the Auditor General so that we know, the people know, they're getting fair value for the asset. The problem is, they want to sell this asset at a fire sale price because they want to make the budget look a little better. They want to make the bottom line look a little better. Somebody out there is going to get a bargain, or at least they're going to be portrayed as getting a bargain from the government. But the reality is, there are so many liabilities attached to the sale of Hydro One that there may not be as many suitors as they like to think. Before they have a deal, before they sign anything, it better be vetted by those two officers of the Legislature so that the people who have paid for that asset know that the government is selling it for fair value, not at a fire sale price because they're trying to dig themselves out of the hole that they put themselves in.

That's what's wrong about this government: They want to blame everybody else, including Stephen—oh, don't get me started on Stephen Harper and the federal

government, because every time this government has a problem, they try to pin it on Stephen Harper.

Stephen Harper has nothing to do with your deficit here. He has nothing to do with your health tax and the mess you've made in health care. He has nothing to do with the cuts in education and the mess you've made in education. He's had nothing to do with your broken promises, not one of them. Stephen Harper's had nothing to do with it, but every time you find yourself in trouble, you try to blame Stephen Harper. You try to blame Stephen Harper because you can't manage your own affairs. It is about time that this government took responsibility for its own actions.

I understand why the NDP has brought out this motion. They're trying to point out what the effect of mismanagement has led us to. It's a disaster, and the people are going to pay for it. The people are paying for it right now all across the province. They're going to face cuts in hospitals. They're going to face cuts in schools from the very government that always promised, “Oh, no, no, no. We're not going to cut anything. We're going to make sure everything is just running along tickety-boo.”

Well, I'll tell you: If this government stays in office, the people who elected them are going to—they're already regretting it. They're already regretting it, but by the time the next election rolls around, they will send the message to you people because it is a disaster, it is a fraud what you perpetrated on them with the way that you—

Hon. Glen R. Murray: What did you get—6%?

Mr. John Yakabuski: I got more than that, Glen. What did you get?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I got 6% in Sudbury.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I didn't run in Sudbury, Glen. Did you run in Sudbury?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Your party did.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh. You weren't up there trying to bribe anybody, were you?

What has led to these cuts is the wasted years that this government had to deal with the debt and deficit in this province and chose—not just failed to do it, Speaker, but chose—not to do it. They would rather have been going around buying the support of the people across the province, making sure that everybody was being—

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Well taken care of.

Mr. John Yakabuski: He says, “Well taken care of.” They were being hornswoggled. They were being hornswoggled into believing that this government actually cared about them. What they've done is they have put a tax not only on the people of today, but a tax on the people of tomorrow. If a child is born in Ontario today, he's born with a \$23,000 debt—a \$23,000 debt on his head because of what this government has done.

I wish that this motion didn't have to be quite this way because there are a lot of things in here we'd like to support. But we also can't support the NDP's plan for Ontario.

I just wish the government here would have had some shred of honesty when they were campaigning in the last

election, because what we got from them and what they're delivering today are two completely different stories.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Before I recognize the next speaker, to the member from Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke: There were a number of times that I initially missed where you used what I would deem unparliamentary language. I will give you the opportunity to withdraw, if you did.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Every one of them I withdraw, Speaker, whichever one offended you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm always pleased and privileged to be able to stand here in the House and to talk about a budget that is to come forward and a budget that we faced in 2014.

I have to say, the clearest message that I would like this Liberal government to hear is that Ontarians do not want cuts. That is not what they voted for. That is not what they expected. When we heard a so-called progressive Premier stand up through an election and talk about the things that she was going to do for this province, I certainly did not hear that she was going to be cutting nurses, that she was going to be cutting education, that she was going to privatize our hydro or that she was going to start to privatize our LCBO and make changes. Those are the kinds of things that Ontarians want and deserve to know that they're safe in public hands, and I believe that that, as New Democrats, is what we believe here also.

1710

I just want to go through a few of the cuts that we have found that the Liberals claim do not exist, but we know very well and clear. I'll tell you, Speaker: My office is inundated each and every day with casework because of the cuts that this government has put forward—cuts to our WSIB and what that's doing to workers in this province daily. I have people coming in who have been in the system for quite some time, and now they're being cut off medication; now they're being cut off therapies.

I'm just going to go through some cuts that I found. Let's start with the ones that are directly in my riding. This morning we heard the Deputy Premier talk about how there are not cuts to schools, and that they were making changes. These are just a portion of my riding. I have an east mountain, a central mountain and a west mountain. This is just the central mountain arc: They closed Eastmount Park. They closed Linden Park. They closed Cardinal Heights. For high schools, they're closing Barton, Hill Park and Mountain.

That is just in the centre of my riding. We still have to do the east mountain arc and part of the west mountain. What is this government thinking when it comes to education for our children? These are services that our people in Ontario expect and deserve, and New Democrats are going to stand up every single day in this House and put motions like this forward, to make sure that we're keeping the Liberals on track.

Let's talk about health care and the lack of a cut of nurses—and yet, I had specific nurses from a hospital that's in my riding, Juravinski, send me a note. It says that “a clinical manager informed the nurses on a particular floor”—she said it but I changed it—“just the other day that we are losing eight full-time RN positions, four on each ward,” so that would be two wards. “The positions will be replaced by eight full-time RPNs. Reason: The budget cannot sustain eight full-time RNs. RPNs are cheaper.”

Now, this is a government that states that they're not making cuts. This is a government that states that things aren't going well in our health care, our education and our hydro, yet we're seeing full well, very clearly in front of us, and hearing daily from people that it's unaffordable and that changes are affecting their lives.

I know I don't have a lot of time left, Speaker. Let me just find—okay. Here's another cut, for ODSP. For the Work-Related Benefit, \$100 was always allocated to people on ODSP when they worked, and it would help them within their daily lives, whatever it may be: getting to work, uniforms, clothing, personal care, hygiene, child care, transportation—work-related expenses. But now the Ministry of Community and Social Services—that's very progressive, Speaker—is going to eliminate the Work-Related Benefit as part of their restructuring of OW and ODSP employment benefits, and has said that ongoing work-related expenses will not be covered in its new, restructured Employment-Related Benefit.

Eliminating the Work-Related Benefit will take approximately \$36 million annually out of the pockets of people with disabilities who are on ODSP and are trying to work. Is this the voice of a progressive government? I think not. These are our most vulnerable people, people who have been put into a system at no fault of their own, and yet these are the people that this progressive government has decided to pick on.

I think that's about all of my time, Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mr. Speaker, what a great opportunity. I wouldn't miss this for the world, to get on the record here this afternoon with this NDP motion. It's really interesting to see the rewriting of history. I remember the NDP platform of last June: nine pages in total. Six pages were blank, and the three pages that remained talked about their cutbacks of \$600 million in the province of Ontario. I guess they kind of forgot about that, because there is no question in my mind that last June the NDP, the third party, were Tories in a hurry. They couldn't wait to be to the right of Mr. Hudak. Mr. Hudak was proposing a cut of 100,000 jobs in the province of Ontario, and then the third party was piggy-backing on that to reduce our spending by \$600 million.

But we know the NDP. I was a city councillor in Peterborough, back in 1993. I remember sitting down with my good friends in CUPE in Peterborough. There were tears in their eyes when they heard about the social contract. Mr. Speaker, you remember that. Every collect-

ive agreement in the province of Ontario went like that, and that's what happened then.

To make things worse, in 1993, they froze the ODSP rates in the province of Ontario. In fact, every poverty analyst in the province of Ontario at that particular time said that when the third party froze the ODSP rates in the province of Ontario, it was the start of the downward spiral of poverty in the province of Ontario. Then, my friends in the opposition, they took over government in 1995, and then they slashed the rates by 21%. We remember those days very well. That was the NDP of last June: Tories in a hurry, and good luck to them. It didn't work out very well.

Let's talk about progressive issues in the province of Ontario. My friends in the third party: The greatest social program in the province of Ontario to reduce child poverty was the Ontario Child Benefit program. It's now being indexed. The late June Callwood, one of the most articulate spokespeople on the issue of poverty in the province of Ontario—we now have awards in her honour for people who are involved in reducing poverty—said that the Ontario Child Benefit was the most progressive program in four decades in the province of Ontario. You would have thought that the party of Tommy Douglas and David Lewis and Stephen Lewis would be on board to support that. Were they on board to support that? No.

When we proposed a program to bring in the minimum wage to the province of Ontario, to put in an indexing system in the province of Ontario that was agreed upon by people in the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the people that were involved in poverty reduction in the province of Ontario, you would have thought the party of Michael Cassidy would have supported this. Did they support it, my friends? What did they do? What did they say? No.

Mr. Bob Delaney: They turned it down.

Hon. Jeff Leal: They turned it down. These were all the fundamental building blocks of our budget that we presented last June.

We will continue, as the Premier said and my colleague the Minister of Finance said, to invest in people, we will continue to invest in infrastructure, and we will continue to invest in a positive business climate in the province of Ontario. Don't take my word for it. Take the word of the Royal Bank of Canada, when they said just recently that economic growth in Ontario will grow by 3.3% in 2015; Ontario will lead the nation again. Let me say that again: Ontario will lead the nation again in economic growth.

Interjection.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I'll get to my friend Mr. MacLaren in a moment, flying the airplane around for Patrick Brown and landing at Pearson and Hamilton international airports. But we'll leave that to the end of my speech.

I want to just get back to economics: 3.3% growth, leading the nation. We just got the jobs report for February: 60,000 new full-time jobs created in the province of Ontario, again leading the nation.

It's interesting. As Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, we have a sector in Ontario, the ag sector:

\$34 billion in GDP contributing to Ontario's economy; 760,000 individuals are employed in this sector each and every year; 23% of Ontario's manufacturing capacity is in this area—growth, growth and growth.

But I'm an optimist. You know, when you're bored in Peterborough, you get up every morning, you see the sun rise in the east; you're ready for a great day because you know that this is a great place to live, work and play. I come here—look, I've got a lot of friends on the official opposition benches but, you know, doom and gloom every day, doom and gloom.

But the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that the reality is that Ontario is moving forward. Just recently, of course, there was a by-election in Sudbury, Ontario, an opportunity for all four major parties in Ontario to put their platforms to the people. I'm very pleased that a very articulate man has joined us, Mr. Thibeault, and is doing a great job.

Applause.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Yes, let's give a hand for him.

With the recent train derailment in northern Ontario, he was there supporting the cause, marshalling government resources, which is so important—so important—to make that happen.

Mr. Speaker, I'm told that I'm out of time. But we're prepared to vote down this motion this afternoon.

1720

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate.

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to speak to this motion today. I'm going to start off by just saying that I hope the government will actually bring in a responsible budget this time. The current debt and deficit are resulting in cuts to front-line services and hurting the people who can't access the services they so badly need.

Almost every day in my riding office, we have people coming in asking us for help because this government has run our province into the ground. This government has to prioritize. They have to stop wasting money on things like gas plant scandals and wind turbines and to start investing in people.

We have the highest energy rates on the continent, Mr. Speaker. We used to have the lowest rates. We had a booming economy, and people wanted to come here and invest their money because of those rates. Now we're scaring them away to other provinces.

We're spending \$11 billion on interest. Sadly, that's not going to our hospitals. That's not going to our schools. It's not going to people with special needs. It's not going to developmental services. It's not going to people who need affordable housing. That's \$11 billion on interest payments, and that is at historically low interest rates.

They can't say that they don't have enough money, because they've had the highest revenues in our history, really, and they still continue to run debt and deficits.

The people of Ontario have a right to feel secure about the economy and jobs. Everyone wants to feel secure, knowing they have a job and that they're going to have that ability to provide for their loved ones, just as they

have a right to feel that all the taxes and fees they pay will provide them with access to care and services when they need them. Again, it's not happening. I hear it in my riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. As many of my caucus colleagues share with me, lots of people are coming in to the office every day, emailing and calling with concerns about the services that they're not able to access anymore when they need them the most, particularly our seniors. It's deplorable, some of the things that are happening with our seniors out there—not providing. They paved the way for us, and we cannot turn our back on them at this point in time.

Just recently, I wrote to the Minister of Health asking very specifically to stop the closure of the restorative care unit at the Chesley hospital in my riding. The Chesley RCU is a proactive, supportive program that enjoys an 83% success rate and costs about \$800,000 annually to run. It also saves millions of dollars in diverting patients from ERs. Those people aren't returning to the hospital ER, which is their only other alternative if they're not cared for properly. It enjoys the full support of its staff and patients, who rely on this exemplary program.

To sum it up in the words of a constituent at a public meeting I went to—we had 400 people come out of the woodwork to try to save this program—“This restorative program should be a dedicated line item (in the budget). It is cost-efficient and enables seniors to return to their own homes. It provides in-house physiotherapy, which CCACs do not. It works on memory issues, which CCACs do not. It supports the family, which CCACs do not. Its staff provide care, changes, dressings, bandages, guidance to family members, and it delivers what it promises ... which CCACs do not.

“This program should be showcased and duplicated throughout the province. Too often the seniors, who were the backbone of this country, have become the ‘forgotten’ ones as they tend not to be vocal.... As the number of seniors is set to double in the coming years, restorative programs such as this one must be increased, not cancelled.”

I hope, again, that the government is listening to this, because it truly is a program that works. You would hope that they would actually deploy more of these programs across the province. They're moving more to care at home, which makes sense. It's a good way to do it. People want to be in their homes.

But here's a program that works. Here's one that prepares people to transition from the hospital to their homes so they actually can be there longer, and yet they're not able to find money for this. But do you know what? They seem to find millions and millions of dollars to cover up one of their scandals or a scam that's going on. It's amazing how they always find the chequebook for that.

Mr. Todd Smith: Pan Am Games.

Mr. Bill Walker: Pan Am Games—they're probably going to have to find the chequebook for that to bail some of that out.

They found \$1 billion for the gas plants scandal, but they can't find \$800,000 for seniors' care in a community like Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound. It's shameful that the

government and its minister could not give the seniors in Bruce and Grey the support that they need to keep the Chesley RCU open. Cuts to services for seniors seem to be running rampant in this Liberal administration.

I also have to voice concerns over the continued cuts to home care. Some regions have lost as much as 30% of their home care. Some have completely eliminated care for some patients. I don't understand how I can hear this Liberal government claim that they're putting more money into care and then hear from the front-line providers and patients how their care is being cut, how their surgeries are being cancelled, how they can't access life-saving drugs, how their community is losing the obstetrics unit, and how workers are being laid off from hospitals.

The nurses' association has told us that this government has presided over as many as 1,600 nursing layoffs in the past few years. The layoffs were apparently happening at the same time that they were promoting and advertising almost 3,000 new vacancies for nursing jobs in Ontario. That's quoted from the 2013 HealthForce report.

There is simply no transparency in the system, similar to the lack of transparency on the developmental services wait-list. The same day that I read a media release from the government on how 14,000 children and adults with disabilities were receiving support services sooner, I heard how the Ombudsman is being urged to investigate the ridiculously high developmental services wait-list. One year has passed since this government promised to put \$810,000 into developmental services, yet we still have 21,000 people with developmental disabilities on the wait-list.

Clearly, things are not progressing as the Liberal government claims they are. In fact, these statistics are an embarrassment for the government and, sadly, an embarrassment for the people of Ontario. This government is perpetuating a cycle of failure for some of our most desperate citizens. These cuts are an indication that front-line services are being affected by a growing debt and deficit.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the people at home again to just think about this: \$11 billion in interest payments. Think about that. Think about what you could do in your riding, Mr. Speaker, if you had a portion of that \$11 billion. Think of all of the people who come through your office asking for help—

Mr. Todd Smith: To keep our nurses.

Mr. Bill Walker: To keep our nurses, keep our health care, keep those people out of the hospital—more proactive health care, Mr. Speaker, so that, rather than waiting to try to treat people when they're sick, we could be putting more money into proactive promotion, healthier living.

We could be ensuring that there are more schools. Last year, I sat through three accommodation reviews in schools in my riding. If we lose schools and hospitals in our rural communities—in any community, really, but it's particularly negatively impactful in a rural community—

Mr. Todd Smith: There goes the neighbourhood.

Mr. Bill Walker: Absolutely. You lose one of those, and that's like losing the community. That's the fabric that has built our communities—the spirit of volunteerism, the spirit of people coming out of the woodwork to help with those school programs and with hospital programs.

Put simply, Ontario is increasingly dependent on lines of credit, because it spends more than it collects. This government, in my three and a half years here, every year has come out with a deficit budget. They can't rein in their spending. In my mind, they don't really even seem to be trying to cut that spending. Yet they promise to balance the budget in 2017-18. Their hand-picked economist, Don Drummond, is predicting that they'll have a \$325-billion debt built by that time if they don't stop spending more than they bring in. They have a spending problem, and they need to address that.

I'm going to just go back again. This number sticks out at me every day that I get up and come to this hallowed hall: \$11 billion that's not going to front-line care. It's not going to seniors who want to stay in their homes. It's not going to developmental services. It's not going to folks in Community Living. It's not going to help the frail elderly who need help. It's not going to those people who need their medicines.

Mr. Speaker, we hear all the time, across this province, of waiting lists in our health care system. Why is it that in today's world we still have continued waiting lists with this government? It's because they waste \$11 billion on interest payments. It is my hope that this budget will actually rein in some of that, because we can't continue to go down the road that we continue to go down here.

I hear every time we come out with a new budget that it's going to be fair and equitable and balanced and it's going to be wonderful. But it's not balanced. I'm certainly hopeful and encouraging that this budget will be different. I have to say, sadly—I think “doom and gloom” are the words that my colleague from Peterborough said. Well, doom and gloom, sadly, is an \$11-billion deficit, and spending continually more than you bring in. You can't do it in your home budget, I don't think, or if you do, you've got better sources than I do. So why would this government be any different? Why would we not try to live within our means? Why would we not ensure that every single tax dollar is used effectively, wisely, and we won't have \$11 billion wasted on interest payments alone that could be going to the front line, could be creating jobs, could be giving hope for the future to our young people, could be giving hope for the future to our seniors and to every single citizen of this great province of Ontario?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: I've got to say I'm glad that our caucus has put forward this particular motion, because I think it speaks to two things: the last budget, and what we should be thinking about doing with the budget that's coming up.

It has been really interesting to watch over the last year. Kathleen Wynne and the Liberals went out of their way to try to say that they were different and they were the progressive party, and they were certainly not going to be anything like Tim Hudak. They spent the entire election taking a swipe at Tim Hudak and saying, “Imagine that. You're going to privatize parts of hydro. We wouldn't do that.” Then they ran around and said, “Oh, we're never going to touch the LCBO. Oh, no, we're not going to touch that either. It's Tim Hudak who wants to do that.” The best one of all was when they ran around and said, “Oh, my God, Tim Hudak wants to lay off 100,000 workers. We're opposed to that. We think that's wrong. You have to vote for us because you know us Liberals and our principles and what we stand for—that we would never do such a thing.”

1730

Now what do we find? The Liberals are a bunch of Tories in a hurry. They're outflanking the Conservatives. They should be charged with plagiarism for having stolen what was inside the Tory platform and running with it themselves, now that they're elected. They're Tories in a hurry, Speaker. They're so far right-wing, they're making the Conservatives look like left-wingers. And the sad part is that they don't believe it; they think that, in fact, they're progressive.

Well, let's look at what “progressive” is. They're doing P3s times five. Everything they can do to enhance public-private partnerships they're doing, to be able to build infrastructure, even though the auditor of Ontario has said we've wasted \$8 billion of our money doing something that we could have done cheaper if we had done it in-house.

Why are they doing it? I think it's for two reasons. One is, they're ideologically a bunch of right-wingers. That's the first part. The second thing is, they're able to off-book those investments, so they don't show up on the treasury on the year that the budget is actually being drafted. So they off-book the thing, and they say, “Here we are; we can spend a bunch more money.”

If you look at what they're doing with the privatization of hydro, if you take a look at what they're doing with the partial privatization of our beer and wine sales system, it's pretty darn simple. The problem is they've spent the bank dry over the last 12 years, they've made all kinds of decisions that have put Ontario in a position to be in a \$12-billion deficit, and now they're saying, “Oh, my God, we have a financial crisis. We need to balance the budget. What do we do now? Well, let's sell off our assets. If we can sell off our assets, that's going to allow us to have more money to go back and spend again.” It's akin, Mr. Speaker, to you having a house and the equity on the house is gone because you're mortgaged to the hilt; you have no more line of credit; you've maxed out all your credit cards; but you would love to have a brand new, wall-to-wall, colour TV that's going to cost you a couple of thousand bucks; and you say, “How do I raise the money for that? Sell the furniture.” Essentially, that's what these guys are doing. They're selling

the furniture in order to buy the colour TV. That's the analogy of what they're up to.

I just say, these guys are such a bunch of right-wingers. I look at Kathleen Wynne and I just feel bad for Mr. Hudak, because I think Mr. Hudak is now working with his legal counsel—as the Premier is working with her legal counsel—to figure out how he's going to put together his lawsuit when it comes to plagiarism that the Liberals have done in trying to do what it is the Conservatives said they would do if they became elected. What is really ironic about that is, none of these guys think that they're doing anything non-progressive. They believe themselves. They think they're a bunch of progressives. I'm sorry—

Interjection.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: What were you saying I should call him?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Call him Premier Hudak.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Premier Hudak—right over there. I'm with you. That's pretty well where it's going.

What's really interesting is, if you listen to the Minister of the Environment, if you listen to the dean of the Legislature, if you listen to the new members of the House, they really think they're a bunch of progressives. They really think, "Oh, my God, we're so progressive."

Who's progressive who privatizes hydro; who privatizes our liquor control system; who sells off our assets off-book, by way of doing private partnerships and selling off our equity; who's going out and laying off workers by the tens of thousands?

If you look across the health care system, we're seeing the reduction of nurses. And we're going to find out at the end of this week if the government is going to go forward with what is rumoured to be a reduction of 2% to the GSNs to all our school boards. Put in simple English, they want to cut by 2% the amount of money that they transfer for each and every student that we fund in our system of education. Man, do you know what that means? That means school boards across this province will be laying—

Mr. Han Dong: Lack of enrolment.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: He says "lack of enrolment." Tell that to the Durham school board, which has an increase in enrolment, which has to lay off teachers—because they're already planning to lay people off, based on your 2% reduction to the GSNs.

I just remind my conservative Liberal friends across the way that if you're going to outflank the Conservatives on the right, you should be at least proud of what you do and call yourselves what you are. You are the Liberal Conservative Party of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: You know, there's a big, big elephant in the room. It's got a \$600-million price tag on it.

In the last election, we put out a budget for which the third party—before they even read it, before the ink was even dry on it—had this tidy little press conference

downstairs, very well organized. Too bad they couldn't wrap their bus, and they had no campaign at all, but they had a tidy little press conference to say, "Well, it's not that the Liberal budget is too left-wing for us. It's that we think we can do better. We can find \$600 million in more cuts"—not \$6 million, not \$60 million—\$600 million.

So we went to the people of Ontario with a budget, not only a budget that had been debated around here but a budget that got debated in the election.

We have a problem with the third party, because that elephant—I can see it. It's usually somewhere between the Sergeant-at-Arms and the Speaker's chair. This poor unloved elephant—we're all waiting to find out what that \$600 million was.

Was it \$600 million coming out of education? They say, "No, no, no. We would never touch education." Is it \$600 million coming out of health care? "Oh, no, no, no. It's not coming out of health care."

Unfortunately, parliamentary language doesn't allow me to do it.

But, you know, it was an interesting election—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I enjoy and love a spirited debate—

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Can we stop the clock, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Can we stop the clock? Stop the clock, please.

But what I will encourage on the government side is the fact that—I'm having difficulty hearing the honourable member contribute to this debate, so I would ask that the members on his side please tone it down so that we can enjoy the continuance of his debate. Thank you.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Many of us who have been unlucky in love—of a male persuasion—know what a Dear John letter is. But in the last election, we discovered a new type of letter, which is what happens to people when they are unlucky in politics. It's a Dear Andrea letter. People—

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Point of order: I recognize the member from Nepean—Carleton.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I think the member should withdraw that reference to the leader of the third party. I don't think it's appropriate.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Continue.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, I don't mind giving the opposition time to interfere, but it might be nice if we stopped the clock.

Mr. Speaker, these letters—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I appreciate the comments from the honourable minister, but my decision has been made. The inference is that you were questioning my decision. I would remind the minister not to do that.

Please continue on—

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): —and I remind the deputy government House leader that there was a warning earlier today.

Please continue.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These letters come from people like Sid Ryan, like, “Dear Andrea: I’m sorry your party has moved so far to the right, I can’t support you anymore.”

Or my two-time opponent in the election, Cathy Crowe: “Dear Andrea: I’m really sorry that you’ve somehow raced past Tim Hudak and the Conservatives to take a position that, after running for you in two elections, I’m going to go out and campaign for the Liberals next time,” or Judy Rebick, the intellectual heft of the left, signing letters to the leader.

1740

You know, in the entire history of leaders of parties in this House, I would like to write into history that the political equivalent of the Dear John letter is now the Dear Andrea letter. Now, I can understand—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I appreciate the minister giving me lots of exercise this afternoon. I would ask that when you are referring to a member in this House, you refer to the member either by their title, if you’re referring to the member of the third party opposition, or you refer to the member as from their riding. Please follow those guidelines or I will end your debate.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So what did we run on? Let’s just go through this idea that we were somehow, to use the word of one of the members opposite, “hornswoggled,” or the member for Hamilton East–Stoney Mountain, who said they were tricked. The member from Kitchener–Waterloo said that somehow—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): On a point of order, I recognize the member from—

Mr. John Yakabuski: If one member is expected to withdraw for using a word, the other member can’t be allowed to use the word in a descriptive way. I would think that he should be withdrawing it as well.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I ask the member to withdraw, please.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

It’s interesting. The opposition cries democracy, that they never get time to debate, but I’ve never seen such harassment when I get up to speak. I guess I must be touching a nerve.

The challenge is a little interesting here, because if you look at former—what do you call a former NDP Premier? Well, Premier Harcourt, Premier Rae: What do you call them? You now call them Liberals, because you can’t find a leader from the third party who ever served in government for a length of time who didn’t shortly after leaving politics exit to join the party.

It’s the arrogance, Mr. Speaker. We were accused by the member from Kitchener–Waterloo of being arrogant.

But I’d ask you, is there anything more arrogant, that when a government presents a budget, says, “We are going to present that budget word for word, number to number, for the House”—we made that solemn commitment to the people of Ontario. We got elected. We presented the budget to the House, word for word and number for number. We were true to our word: every period, every punctuation mark. We presented that budget without change. To me, Mr. Speaker, there’s a word for that. That’s called integrity. And then there was another chance for the people of Ontario to cast their opinion on this government. It was called the Sudbury by-election. And what happened? They voted again to send the member, Mr. Thibeault, the MPP from Sudbury, to the House. So, Mr. Speaker, when they use the word “arrogance,” which I’ve heard them use now five times today—I kept track; five times they used that word—who, I may ask, is arrogant? Is it the party that does what it says, makes a commitment to the people of Ontario, then word for word, down to the punctuation, passes and does exactly what they committed to in the election, or the people who keep on telling Ontarians they got it wrong? They were wrong in Sudbury; they just didn’t understand the third party. They were wrong in the general election. “Clearly, we didn’t get our message out.”

They have been the third party for 20-plus years right now. How long is it going to take them to realize that the people of Ontario are right and you’re wrong? It might be suggested to you that it is arrogant to keep on telling 14 million people that they constantly get it wrong, because on this side of the House, we actually think the people of Ontario get it right. Sometimes we lose and sometimes we win, but we don’t tell the people we work for that they constantly get it wrong.

So why would they actually be voting for us? Maybe it’s because we built 728 new schools. Maybe it’s because we repaired 700 schools—and maybe because in those constituencies that are now represented by people on this side, that’s where a lot of those schools were. They slowly stopped voting for the parties opposite because, after 40 or 50 years of waiting to get their schools fixed, they got their schools fixed.

Our education budget has been increased by 50%.

Hon. Jeff Leal: Fifty?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Fifty per cent, and our hospital budgets by 55%, with 19 new hospitals, some of them in what were formerly Conservative and NDP ridings, like the member from Beaches–East York’s, like the member from Halton’s, like the member from Burlington’s. I could go on, but it would get a little boring because there are so many new members over here. That makes it a little boring.

We don’t actually think that’s trickery or some of the words that I wouldn’t use which they got away with, Mr. Speaker, which are unparliamentary. You and I would be most upset if those words were repeated.

I think the people of Ontario are pretty smart. Every year that we have had a reasonably strong economy—and

we did not inherit one—we have been in a surplus situation. Every year that we've set a deficit target, we have met it. We are down from \$24 billion to \$12 billion.

They keep on running off, “\$29 million a day is what it costs to service the debt.” Let's just take a minute and break that down. What is that spent on? It's like the mortgage on your house. If you think the mortgage on your house is a waste of money, I guess you'd be rich enough to pay it in cash. But we don't build highways like the 427 or the 401 expansion. We actually use debt financing as a rational tool of government. All the hospitals down the street here have been rebuilt and expanded. We put that on debt.

We have been prudent managers of debt. Whether it's highways, public schools, northern roads, new subway and rapid transit lines, marine infrastructure, new court-houses or social service agencies, the capital program of this government is a reasonable one.

We have for 200 years now in Ontario used debt financing, and we are committed, in 2017-18, to getting back to balance. It's a perfectly reasonable proposition which the poor folks getting Dear John letters of a certain sort might want to pay attention to.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Further debate?

Ms. Catherine Fife: It's really interesting, Mr. Speaker. We just came from this wonderful event honouring Stephen Lewis, and he talked about a time in politics when, in this Legislature, there could be an honest discourse and debate about the state of Ontario. This motion actually addresses the real, lived experience of people in Ontario.

When the new member from Beaches–East York gets up and compares the state of Ontario to having a T-ball and trying to hit it out of the park, it really demeans the debate and the profession. That's why people don't have faith in this place and in politics.

The motion that we brought to the floor today is very reasonable, actually. It asks the Liberal Party to take an honest look at where you are going, because the privatization agenda in the province of Ontario is running this province into the ground, and you are doing that with intention. It's not like you're doing it by accident; you're doing it with intention.

The 50 nurses who are being fired at CHEO, the state of long-term care in the province of Ontario—it's embarrassing that seniors are getting such poor care under the leadership—the 42 nurses in Sudbury, 22 nurses in Cambridge, 15 nurses in Leamington, 18,000 nursing hours in New Liskeard: These cuts are real. For us, we're trying to address this issue of, when is a cut really a cut in the mind of a Liberal government? There are going to be people on the front lawn all spring. They're going to come, they're going to raise their voices and we're going to support them.

The Auditor General found the money for you. That is what's so frustrating. We don't need to find \$600 million in privatizing IT services or privatizing the way that you actually deliver infrastructure and public services. She

found it for you. She's an independent officer of this Legislature. All she has met with from this government is complete disdain—complete disdain. One member even yelled across and said she doesn't count properly. This is the Auditor General. She found the money for you. You need to wake up and recognize that if you do not stop the privatization agenda in this province, you will ruin this province of Ontario. You will do that.

So we brought this motion to the floor of this Legislature to raise the awareness of it, and all we got was little games and letters. Really, you just proved that the arrogance is real and alive and kicking in the province of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Please be seated.

Ms. Fife has moved opposition day motion number 2. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour of the motion will please say “aye.”

All those in disapproval of the motion, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the nays have it.

Call in the members. There will be a 10-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1751 to 1801.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): All members take their seats, please.

All those in favour, please stand to be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Armstrong, Teresa J.	French, Jennifer K.	Natyshak, Taras
Bisson, Gilles	Gretzky, Lisa	Tabuns, Peter
Fife, Catherine	Hatfield, Percy	Taylor, Monique
Forster, Cindy	Mantha, Michael	

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): All those opposed will please stand and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Albanese, Laura	Gravelle, Michael	McMahon, Eleanor
Anderson, Granville	Harris, Michael	Meilleur, Madeleine
Bailey, Robert	Hoggarth, Ann	Moridin, Peter Z.
Baker, Yvan	Hoskins, Eric	Morici, Reza
Balkissoon, Bas	Hunter, Mitzie	Munro, Julia
Ballard, Chris	Jaczek, Helena	Murray, Glen R.
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Jones, Sylvia	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Bradley, James J.	Kiwala, Sophie	Potts, Arthur
Chan, Michael	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Chiarelli, Bob	Lalonde, Marie-France	Sandals, Liz
Clark, Steve	Leal, Jeff	Scott, Laurie
Colle, Mike	MacCharles, Tracy	Sergio, Mario
Coteau, Michael	MacLeod, Lisa	Smith, Todd
Crack, Grant	Malhi, Harinder	Sousa, Charles
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit	Thibeault, Glenn
Delaney, Bob	Martins, Cristina	Vernile, Dalene
Dhillon, Vic	Martow, Gila	Walker, Bill
Dickson, Joe	Matthews, Deborah	Wilson, Jim
Dong, Han	Mauro, Bill	Wong, Soo
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McDonnell, Jim	Yakabuski, John
Fraser, John	McGarry, Kathryn	Zimmer, David

The Clerk of the Assembly (Ms. Deborah Deller):

The ayes are 11; the nays are 63.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I declare the motion defeated.

Motion negated.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Pursuant to standing order 38, the question that this House do now adjourn is deemed to have been made.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): We do have a late show, so I would ask the members, if you're not involved, to please disperse quickly and quietly.

The member for Timmins-James Bay has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given this morning by the Deputy Premier. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the Deputy Premier may reply for up to five minutes.

The member from Timmins-James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I didn't know I had such power to be able to clear a room as effectively as we just did.

I just want to come back to the question, because we have now, for about 140 times, asked essentially the same question to the Deputy Premier and the Premier, over and over again, having to do with the Sudbury election bribery scandal.

Is anybody going to be left to answer the question? Oh, okay. There we go.

I'd just say again, Mr. Speaker, for 140 times now, we've stood in this House and we've asked essentially the same question, and the question is having to do with the Sudbury bribery scandal.

To recap, Mr. Olivier, who was the candidate in the previous election, had declared that he was interested in running for the nomination in the Sudbury by-election. Mr. Olivier made sure to make that known, and in the end, Mr. Olivier declared that in fact he was going to be a candidate.

What ended up happening is, the government decided to offer Mr. Olivier a job, or an appointment, in order to get him to stand down, to not run for office. We have that not by hearsay, Mr. Speaker. We have that because of the tapes that Mr. Olivier made of his conversations with both Pat Sorbara and Gerry Lougheed, who both went there in order to meet, to talk to him about not running. They were on tape, so we have the voices. Nobody is saying it wasn't them that said these things.

What was said was simply this: They were there on behalf of the Premier. They were there to make an offer to Mr. Olivier—to nominate Mr. Thibeault, the candidate that they wanted to appoint to run in the upcoming by-election. If he was to do that, they would offer him a job.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, it's a contravention of the law, because the election law says that once a candidate has

declared that they want to run for a nomination, you can't offer a job and you can't offer an appointment as a way of dissuading them to run or not run. So there was a clear breach of the Election Act.

I filed a complaint on behalf of New Democrats with Elections Ontario. The Chief Electoral Officer did an investigation, and the Chief Electoral Officer came back and said there was an apparent breach of the law. "Apparent breach" means exactly that: There is enough there to justify charges possibly being laid. Now it is before the Ministry of the Attorney General to decide if charges are going to be laid.

At the same time, the Ontario Provincial Police have been doing an investigation, because both the opposition parties sent letters to the Ontario Provincial Police saying, "We believe there's a Criminal Code violation."

Prior to the tapes being released, the OPP came back and said no, there is no evidence of that at this point. But once the tapes became public, they decided that, in fact, they were going to investigate, because again, the opposition parties sent in letters to the commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police and said, "Now, in light of these tapes, we believe that there is a contravention of the Criminal Code." So they're now doing the investigation.

1810

The question really becomes this—and I'm hoping that the parliamentary assistant can answer this specific question: Either Mrs. Sorbara and Mr. Lougheed were acting on their own—and if that was the case, then why doesn't the Premier fire those people for having done something which is in apparent breach of the law? It would stand to reason that if somebody did something and they didn't have the permission to do it and the Premier knew nothing about it, then she should fire these people. I think it would be pretty clear. Or is it the case that in fact the Premier ordered these people to do that? What's clear on the tapes—and I think it's the latter—the tape says, "I'm here on behalf of the Premier." They both spoke about trying to do what the Premier wanted. So, clearly, there had to be some kind of discussion between Mrs. Sorbara and Mr. Lougheed, in some kind of way, with the Premier for them to go and do this, which means that the Premier, in the end, will be in apparent breach of the act, once the OPP is finished the investigation, if they're able to prove that.

I put the question back to the parliamentary assistant: Why is it that this government has not done what it should have done, which is to take responsibility for this and say to these two individuals, "Step aside while the investigation is ongoing"? Then, based on the charges laid, if they're laid or not, and depending on the result of the charges if they're laid—that they are either permanently gone, or they come back if they're found to be nothing. To this point, the government has never answered the question as to why it is that they have not taken that position.

So I ask the parliamentary assistant again: Why is it that Pat Sorbara and Mr. Lougheed are still in the positions that they hold, making decisions on behalf of

Ontarians, at a time when they both have been found in contravention of the act and are being investigated by the Ontario Provincial Police?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): I now refer to the parliamentary assistant, the member from Etobicoke Centre, for an up-to-five-minute reply.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I will be relatively brief.

I will say that the Premier takes this matter very seriously. The Premier has spoken to this issue repeatedly here before all of us.

This investigation is independent of government and independent of this House. If you read what the Chief Electoral Officer recently stated, he said, "I am neither deciding to prosecute a matter nor determining anyone's guilt or innocence. Those decisions are respectively for prosecutors and judges." We, as the government, will co-operate fully with that investigation.

The opposition knows that it's inappropriate for us to comment on an ongoing investigation. In fact, here's what the member from Timmins-James Bay recently said: "You do have a larger responsibility to make sure you're careful in your use of your words so that you don't interfere in any way."

So the opposition knows that it's inappropriate for us to comment on the ongoing investigation. We're not going to do that. But the Premier and the government will continue to co-operate fully with that investigation.

BY-ELECTION IN SUDBURY

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The member from Windsor-Tecumseh has also filed dissatisfaction with the response given by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. The member from Windsor-Tecumseh has up to five minutes.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: During question period, most people in Ontario expect their elected representatives to stand up in this chamber and either ask a question or give an answer to a question that has been put to them directly. It's common courtesy. We may not like the question, but the voters, especially those watching these proceedings at home, are engaged and feel that the question is being asked on their behalf. Therefore, they expect an answer to be given to the question that has been put. That didn't happen on Wednesday, the 11th of March. I asked the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change when he was first briefed about the plan to offer Andrew Olivier a job in order for him to get out of the Premier's way in the Sudbury by-election, so she could appoint someone without that person having to sell membership cards for the nomination battle. My question was not answered.

I tried again in the supplementary question, reminding the minister that he had a vested interest because his parliamentary assistant, the new member from Sudbury, was at the centre of the scandal that's under investigation by the OPP anti-rackets squad—again, no answer. We had deflection about the loss of a large percentage of the

apple crop in southwestern Ontario, but no answer to a simple question. Answers should be given to the questions posed.

Speaker, I've read the transcripts of those taped conversations at the heart of the Sudbury bribery scandal. Mr. Lougheed meets with Mr. Olivier in person for what he calls an eyeball-to-eyeball conversation. The Premier and Ms. Sorbara have been talking, and Mr. Lougheed says, "So I come to you, on behalf of the Premier, and on behalf of, yes, Thibeault"—that being the new member from Sudbury, Glenn Thibeault. Mr. Lougheed clearly states that he's there to do the bidding of the Premier and Mr. Thibeault, to ask Mr. Olivier to step down and even nominate Mr. Thibeault.

He states very clearly that the Premier wants to talk to Mr. Olivier as well, and he says, "They would like to present to you options in terms of appointments, jobs, whatever...."

They agree it will be a tough decision for Mr. Olivier to step aside for Mr. Thibeault, and Mr. Lougheed says, "[I]f you take the high road on this, what is your reward?" "[W]hat's in it for you? ... [W]hat do we give to Andrew Olivier?" And he admits he's already raised the question and the Premier wants to have that conversation. But Mr. Lougheed says that "she doesn't want to be told to eff off"—and that's all in the transcript, Speaker.

For her part, Ms. Sorbara says, "You've been asked by the leader and the Premier to make a decision to step aside to allow Glenn to have ... the opportunity uncontested." She suggests she doesn't want this conversation to be seen as Mr. Olivier being offered a consolation prize. There is committee work available and "if, for example, you wanted to be an executive of the Ontario Liberal Party" or on a government accessibility committee or a government board—then, Speaker, the discussion rolls around to the possibility of a job working in the constituency office of Mr. Thibeault.

And Ms. Sorbara says, "Okay so, we talked about that, and I think Glenn would actually be very open to that." And then she says, "[A]ctually Glenn said that a week or so ago, when we were chatting," but he didn't want Mr. Olivier to think being a constituency assistant was a consolation prize either.

Ms. Sorbara says later: "[W]hether it's a full time or a part time job in a const office, whether it is appointments, supports, or commissions, whether it is also going on the exec...."

Speaker, one last point from these transcripts. You'll recall that Mr. Lougheed says, right off the top, "[I] come to you on, behalf of the Premier...." He isn't there on his own initiative. He's the Premier's voice at that meeting—the Premier, by the way, who likes to hold herself up as a champion of women's rights and as someone who encourages women to be more involved by seeking political office. Her voice in Sudbury, Mr. Lougheed, in the course of this recorded conversation, disparages a former mayor of Sudbury, Marianne Matichuk, who, by the way, was about to announce her intention to seek that nomination.

Mr. Loughheed refers to her as "that woman" and tells Mr. Olivier that she should "just ... get lost." Well, Speaker, she didn't get lost. The Premier's voice in Sudbury, the man who is having this conversation with Mr. Olivier, is saying that she should get lost. Why isn't the Premier saying to Mr. Loughheed, "You're the one who should get lost, buddy"?

Will the real Kathleen please stand up? Kathleen Wynne, stand up for the women in this province who wish to run for public office, stand up for your ministers and tell them to answer questions in question period, and stand up for the truth. That's all we're asking.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We take this matter very seriously on this side of the House. The investigation is independent of government and independent of this House, as it well should be.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier has answered this question more than enough in this House. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Rick Nicholls): Since it is well past the hour and our late shows are now complete, this House stands adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 1819.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
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Clerk / Greffière: Deborah Deller

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Todd Decker, Tonia Grannum, Trevor Day, Anne Stokes

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergent d'armes: Dennis Clark

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Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
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Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
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Hardeman, Emie (PC)	Oxford	
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Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
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Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
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Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Associate Minister of Finance (Ontario Retirement Pension Plan) / Ministre associée des Finances (Régime de retraite de la province de l'Ontario)
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MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
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Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
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Potts, Arthur (LIB)	Beaches–East York	
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Thibeault, Glenn (LIB)	Sudbury	
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
Vanthof, John (NDP)	Timiskaming–Cochrane	
Vernile, Daiene (LIB)	Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre	
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Kathryn McGarry, Eleanor McMahon
Taras Natyshak, Peggy Sattler
Laurie Scott, Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

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